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LENTEN
LESSONS.



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LENTEN LESSONS

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PREFACE.

IN adding another to the already numerous works for Lent, a few words of explanation appear to be due.

This little Book was written at the request of a friend, whose household chiefly consisted of servants. She found them, generally, not only entirely ignorant of the true use of Lent, but prejudiced against its observance, regarding it as a Popish superstition ; and she sought in vain amongst the Books which she had found profitable to herself, for one which would instruct, without offending them ; and which she could read, or lend to them.

No attempt has been made in these pages, to enter into the subject controversially, but after explaining in the first few chapters the design of Lent, and the reason of its institution, the writer has endeavoured to follow, from day to day, the course of a Christian Churchman during this solemn season ; to show his difficulties and discouragements ; and to draw out the lessons which are taught him in the Church's

appointed Services, believing that if this can be done, the most prejudiced must acknowledge her wisdom in setting apart a special season for meditation, retirement, and devotion; and must see, that, so far from leading to self-righteousness, and self-dependence, the effect of Lent, when rightly kept, will ever be to show us so much sinfulness, as to make us abhor ourselves in dust and ashes; and so much helplessness, as to drive us more and more to that Lamb of God, who is, at this time, so vividly brought before us, as taking away the sins of the world.

LENTEN LESSONS.

Ash-Wednesday.

To-day is the beginning of Lent, or the season immediately before Good Friday and Easter.

On those Days we commemorate the love of our Saviour in dying for us, and His victory in rising again from the grave ; and during Lent we are taught, by our Church, to prepare our minds for the consideration of these two great events, and are also instructed in what way we can best prove our gratitude to our Lord for all that He has done for us. The first thing which our Church teaches us, as requisite, is repentance. She tells us in the Commination Service (which is used to-day) that she has thought good that the sentences of God's cursing against impenitent sinners should be read in the presence of all ; to the intent that, being admonished of the great indignation of God against sinners, they may be moved to earnest and true repentance.

Now what is repentance ? It is said in the dictionary to mean such sorrow for sin as produces amendment of life, and this appears to be exactly what we are taught to aim at in the portion of Scripture appointed to be read as the Epistle for to-day. We find in it the Prophet Joel addressing the people of Judah, and calling upon them to be sorry for their

sins ; to acknowledge them with weeping, fasting, and mourning ; and to turn to the Lord their God, or in other words, to lead a new life.

He had before warned them of God's anger towards them ; and of the punishments which He was preparing for them, on account of their wickedness ; and now he reminds them that though they are such sinners, God is so "gracious and merciful" that He may even yet spare them, if they will repent and return to Him ; but that in order to obtain this forgiveness, pains must be bestowed. That they must give themselves time to think of their sins ; must set apart a day for that purpose, when they could all assemble together, and must not only cry to God themselves, but get their ministers to entreat Him also that He would not give them over to reproach.

And just so would our Church have us begin the solemn season of Lent. We are about to learn, in a way which Joel never knew, that the Lord "is gracious and merciful ; slow to anger, and of great kindness ;" for we are about to commemorate His love in sending His only Son into the world, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life¹ ;" but alas ! we know that even this love cannot save those who continue in their sins ; for our Saviour declares, "Except ye repent, ye shall all perish." And therefore, before the Church leads us to the contemplation of His death and Passion, she sets apart a day, in which we may all meet together ; in order, as she tells us (in the Commination Service), that we may bewail and lament our sinful lives ; acknowledge and confess our offences, and seek to bring forth worthy fruits of penance, that is to say, repentance.

I trust we shall all be able to attend the services of our Church to-day, for in no other way can Lent

¹ John iii. 16.

² Luke xiii. 3.

be so well begun ; but in order fully to profit by them, time must be taken beforehand to think over the sins we have to confess, and to form good resolutions against the time to come. We must try to discover what are the faults into which we have fallen during the past year, and especially what are the sins which most easily beset us ; and then make a firm determination by God's grace to fight against them during the coming season.

Having done this, we shall be able heartily to join in the prayers that God will "forgive us our trespasses," and that He will "make haste to help us ;" and we shall be glad to hear the comfortable words of to-day's Psalm, "that God will teach us the way wherein we should go, and will guide us with His eye," for we shall have learned by self-examination how weak and helpless we are.

But if, for any reason, the privilege of thus beginning Lent by going to church be denied to us—still, do not let us allow Ash-Wednesday to pass without remembrance. We may not be able to join in person with God's people, but in spirit we may be with them. In the retirement of our own room we can join our prayers to theirs, "That God will be pleased to create in us new and contrite hearts." We can read the Psalms and portions of Scripture which our Church has appointed, and we can meditate over that exhortation which she has to-day addressed to her children. Above all, we can in secret ponder over our faults, beseech God to pardon them, make good resolutions for the future, and ask for grace and strength to keep them.

And let us not fear but that that Great Being "to whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid," will regard our cry, and will hearken to our requests with as much favour as to the petitions of His great congregation ; and that if we abide by the resolutions thus formed, we shall have a holy Lent and a happy Easter.

First Thursday in Lent.

1 CORINTHIANS ix. 24—27.

“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”

WHEN we were speaking yesterday of the way in which we should observe Ash-Wednesday, in order properly to begin Lent, perhaps the question might come into your mind, What is Lent? and why should I keep it at all?

Lent is, as you know, the season immediately before Easter, and has been kept from a very early age by our Church, as a period of fasting and mortification. In it we commemorate the forty days spent by our Saviour in the Wilderness; and we seek as it were a wilderness for ourselves by abstaining from some lawful indulgences. The verses which we have just read, and which form part of the Epistle for Septuagesima Sunday, or the third Sunday before Lent, form a suitable introduction to that season. St. Paul here compares the Christian’s life to a race-course, and us to the racers. And he tells us, that the racers might just as well expect to attain the goal without care, exertion, and preparation, as a Christian to attain Heaven without pains and effort.

You know before a man can with any hope of success engage in a race, he must submit to be trained. This training consists of great attention

to diet, not eating or drinking too much, but being, as St. Paul says, temperate in all things, and forming habits of exertion and endurance. All this is submitted to, in order that when the day of the race arrives, he may have become so inured to hardships, and his body may be in such condition, that he may not be overcome by the toil.

And it is to assist us in doing this that the season of Lent is appointed. We are all running a race. The race-course is this world in which we live. The end is Heaven. The Judge is the Almighty, and the reward is the crown which He has laid up for them who love Him. Every thought of our heart, every action of our life may be compared to steps in a race, for every thought, and every action brings us nearer to the goal, or takes us further from it. We require to bestow pains to make our actions such as, through Jesus Christ, will bring us nearer to Heaven, just as much as the racer does to make his steps such as will bring him to the goal. In the portion of Scripture just read, St. Paul indeed enforces temperance at all times, and not only at particular seasons. But may it not be a good discipline for acquiring this general habit of self-denial, to practise more than ordinary abstinence for a certain portion of time? Our Church has thought that it may, and has therefore appointed the season of Lent for this purpose. We then abstain even from some things, the indulgence of which is not forbidden, in order that we may gain self-control, and that when more severe privations have to be endured, they may not seem strange to us; for a person is much more likely to fail in the hour of trial, who has never exercised self-restraint, than one who has practised it beforehand. St. Paul tells us that the way in which he prepared himself for his race, was by keeping under his body, and bringing it into subjection; and what was needful for St. Paul must be equally so for us.

We are engaged in a far nobler race than that described in the text. In that the reward was only a corruptible crown, made of leaves, but ours is an incorruptible one, reserved in Heaven for those who fear God. And yet the old Greeks, to whom St. Paul was writing, thought it a great honour to be allowed to run, and esteemed no labour too great to prepare them for it. And even so it is a great privilege to be allowed to run the Christian's race, and it is one which we should never have obtained had not Christ died for us.

When Adam sinned, he forfeited all claim to this privilege, for Heaven was closed against him. But Christ Jesus came to open the gates. He ran the race first, and left us an example that we should follow His steps. That example is especially set before us at this time of the year, and it should be our great aim to study it, and prepare ourselves to imitate it; just as we should try to imitate a master who was training us to run. We should practise self-denial in smaller matters, in order that we may be better prepared for heavier trials. We must try to follow Jesus in the little every-day temptations which beset us, feeling sure that He who has enabled us to overcome one difficulty in our course will not forsake us when greater ones befall us, but will make us in the end more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

first Friday in Lent.

2 CORINTHIANS xi. 22—27.

“ Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more, in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness."

IN these verses St. Paul describes the sufferings which it had been necessary for him to endure in his Christian course. Had he shrunk from these dangers, his appointed duty as a preacher would not have been fulfilled. But would he have been prepared to make such painful sacrifices on these occasions, if he had lived at other times a life of self-indulgence? No; he found it necessary, as we saw in the verses which we read yesterday, to keep his body under, lest after all he might be a castaway.

One great objection is often brought against people who wish to obey the rules of our Church by making Lent a season of self-denial. It is this: that they are trusting to fasting, prayer, &c., to gain Heaven. Now this objection may be answered by referring to the example of St. Paul. There never was a man more afraid of putting any thing in the place of Christ than he was. In all he did, he was actuated by but one motive,—a desire to prove his love to that Saviour who had delivered him, the chief of sinners, from the punishment due to him,—so that if we follow his example, we shall be in no danger of thinking that any good deed whatever is of any worth in itself, but only as a means of showing love to Christ. But, indeed, whoever thinks otherwise can have very little idea of what it requires to gain an entrance into God's Kingdom. Did the Grecian

combatants think the crown was won when they found that by training they were become light, and active, and able to run without fatigue? Oh no, they waited till the day of contest, and were well satisfied if all their previous discipline enabled them then to lay hold of the prize. And just in the same way will the true Churchman, and real Christian, regard any discipline or self-denial, which he may practise during Lent. Far from esteeming it worthy of any reward, he will only consider it as a means of enabling him to run his Christian course without fainting.

He knows that the Saviour has said, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me³," and he knows, that that Christian is more likely to be able to deny himself in great matters, who has learnt to do it in small, and that he who during a certain portion of time, has accustomed himself to give up his will in trifles, is less likely to fail in the day of great trial, than he who has become habituated to a course of self-indulgence.

Remember the example of St. Paul. What was necessary for him must also be so for us. He counted not himself to have apprehended, but was still pressing toward the mark, and using every help of which he could avail himself. He constantly remembered that he was not his own, but was bought with a price; and that he was bound to serve his Master, not only with his soul and spirit, but with his body too. And in order that he might do this, he maintained a constant course of self-denial. He did not for one moment imagine he could by these means gain Heaven; but only that he should, by them, obtain such command over himself, that he should be ready for any service to which his Lord might call him.

³ Luke ix. 23.

And with the same feelings must we enter Lent. Whatever we undertake must be done for the sake of Christ, and in the humble hope of proving our love to Him ; and day by day we must examine ourselves, to see whether our discipline really is doing us good, and whether we are becoming stronger, and better able to fight under His banner, against sin, the world, and the devil, and to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

First Saturday in Lent.

TITUS ii. 11—14.

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world ; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

I THINK, by this time, we must begin to see why our Church has appointed the season of Lent. The Bible tells us that through Adam’s sin our lives were forfeited, and that our Saviour redeemed them by the sacrifice of His own. Before His death, He left us His dying injunction, “If ye love Me, keep My commandments⁴.” Now in order to do this, we must wage a perpetual warfare with Christ’s enemies, “the world, the flesh, and the devil ;” and this involves a constant course of self-denial ; and it is to accustom ourselves to this warfare, and to train our-

⁴ John xiv. 15.

selves to this self-denial, that during Lent we practise more than ordinary abstinence.

But now comes the practical inquiry—What are the things I must give up, and the duties I must practise, in order to make Lent a profitable season?

This is a question which each one must answer for himself. To many, fasting, in the proper sense of the word—that is, abstaining entirely for a certain period from food—is impracticable; their health would suffer from it; it would be impossible for them to perform the duties of their station if they attempted it; and those in authority over them would disapprove of it. But every one who tries may find out some way in which to practise self-denial. Though they cannot leave off food, they may make a rule of partaking of it more sparingly, and of leaving off something of which they are fond; they may rise at an earlier hour, and employ the time thus gained in reading and devotion; or they may set apart a certain portion of their own leisure to working for the poor; and give up, during Lent, all light and amusing reading. In short, there are many ways in which we may practise self-denial for the sake of self-denial, and, like St. Paul, “bring under the body, and keep it in subjection.”

But we must not imagine that this is the sole or indeed the chief use of Lent. It is also a special time for self-examination, for finding out what are our besetting sins, and, by God’s help, making a mighty effort to subdue them. Now is the special time for thinking over our duties, and if we discover one we have neglected, for setting about performing it. And now, above all, is it a special time to meditate much on that Saviour who can alone enable us to do all this; and to warm our sluggish hearts by a remembrance of His love. May He give us grace to endure hardness as His good soldiers, and to perform all our duties for His sake. Amen.

First Sunday in Lent.

MATTHEW iv. 1-11.

“Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to Him, he said, If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee: and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth Him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him.”

THOSE who, in obedience to the rules of their Church, have resolved to make Lent a season of retirement and of spiritual improvement, a season when they will especially endeavour to mortify the lusts of the flesh, and advance in their spiritual course, will find that they have entered upon a difficult work.

They have voluntarily engaged to be, in an especial manner, during this period, the Lord's soldiers, and to fight against sin, the world, and the devil ; and Satan, who is ever on the look-out, will take care their promise shall not be an idle one—he will give them plenty to do.

Just at first it seems an easy thing to perform the pledge which we have taken. You have made a solemn resolution before God, that you will resist your besetting sin, whatever it may be ; and you are thinking that you will not once give way to it during the next six weeks, and are already imagining how pleasant it will be at Easter to look back upon your victory. But depend upon it your task will not be thus lightly accomplished ; your great enemy will not be thus defeated. He will try, by every means in his power, to make you fall ; and wonderful will it be if he does not succeed. If he cannot manage it one way, he will try another, and will tempt you by means which you have never thought of, and against which, therefore, you have never guarded. But be not discouraged, and, above all, never think of giving up the contest. He would be a poor soldier who retreated because the enemy attacked him, and a feeble runner who gave up because his course was not all smooth. Ever remember that it is not in your own strength that the warfare is to be carried on. Though your Saviour may seem to abandon you, it is only in order to try your faith. He is really beholding you with eyes of love, ready, even if you sin, to be your Advocate, and to strengthen you in your next struggle. He has promised, that if you "resist the devil, he will flee from you⁵;" and His promises are Yea and Amen,—they cannot fail. Go on calmly, from day to day, asking His assistance every morning, and every evening examining how far you have suc-

⁵ James iv. 7.

ceeded, and confessing your sins to Him "who is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," and you will find that the season of Lent will not have been passed in vain.

Remember too, when the devil assaults you, he is only acting to you as he did to your Lord and Master. In the verses we have just read, which have been chosen as the Gospel for to-day, we find that our Lord, before entering upon His ministry, sought a season of retirement in which to prepare Himself for His duties by prayer and fasting. And when the devil tempted Him by the lusts of the flesh, by pride, and by ambition, every time our Saviour drove him away, not by any supernatural means, as He might have done, but by those which are open to us all. He caused him to flee by quoting Holy Scripture. The Word of God is compared by St. Paul to "a sword," and our Saviour, in this conflict with the evil one, set us an example of the way in which we are to fight with it.

When the devil tempts us to despair, to think that we are making no progress, and shall never be any better than we are, we must fight him with some such text as "My grace is sufficient for thee"; or, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." When he would make us think it hard to be watchful and self-denying, we must fall back upon St. John's experience, God's "commandments are not grievous." When he would make us think we have been trying long enough, and may now have a little rest, we must say, "Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." And when he makes a grand effort, brings against us all his forces, and seems resolved to throw us down, let us take our Lord's own method,

⁶ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

⁸ 1 John v. 3.

⁷ Phil. iv. 13.

⁹ Gal. vi. 9.

and in humble dependence on Him boldly say, "Get thee hence, Satan: it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve;" and "I am resolved to serve and worship Him alone."

Monday after First Sunday in Lent.

READ Matthew iv. 1—11, the same as yesterday. Also,

HEBREWS iv. 14—16.

"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

THE temptation of our Lord must always be a profitable subject of meditation to the Christian during Lent; for it is in humble imitation of Him that we observe this season. Our Master fasted forty days; and therefore we, His disciples, during that time should use such abstinence that, our flesh being subdued to the spirit, we may obey God in righteousness and true holiness.

We yesterday considered the means our Lord used to resist the devil, let us now see what were the temptations with which the devil assaulted Him. At our Baptism we promised to resist three kinds of

temptation, "the works of the devil," which may be said to include all gross sins, such as lying, swearing, &c.; "the lusts of the flesh," as drinking, adultery, sloth, and indolence; "and the pomps and vanity of the world," by which seem to be meant such sins as pride and ambition. Under one or other of these heads every temptation may be included, and our Saviour suffered Himself to be assaulted by all three. And "in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted¹."

The devil first tried to tempt His appetite, which is one of the lusts of the flesh; then His pride, asking Him to cast Himself down from the temple; and lastly, endeavoured to seduce Him into committing one of the vilest works of the devil, and actually asked Him, for the sake of earthly gain, to worship him, the father of lies and of all evil. Our Lord did not for a moment yield to any of these temptations; but the knowledge that He has been tried by them, makes it much easier for us to go to Him for help. In one or other of the ways we have mentioned, the devil is sure to try us; and when he does, how sweet it is to remember that our Saviour

"Knows what sore temptations mean,
For He has felt the same."

We all know how easy it is to talk to persons who have been placed in the same circumstances with ourselves; how well they can sympathize with us, and how valuable their advice is; and when we tell our troubles to our Lord, we do it with the certainty that He not only has experienced them Himself, but that He remembers them well. Every part of His temptation in the wilderness is as present to His mind now as it was the day it happened, for a

¹ Heb. ii. 18.

thousand years with Him are but as one day ; and when His people cry to Him for help to overcome their desire for ease, or self-indulgence ; when He sees them striving to resist their inclinations to place themselves in situations of peril for the mere sake of showing how well they can get out again, as He would have done had He gone to a pinnacle of the Temple ; when He beholds them rejecting offers of worldly advantage, because they know they cannot accept them without serving the devil more than God, He sees in them His own conflict renewed, and is as ready to fight Satan on their account as He was on His own. "Let us therefore," as St. Paul tells us, "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need²." Let us not be afraid of confessing our shortcomings, "for we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin³."

Again, it often happens in seasons like Lent, when we are very earnestly trying to do what is right, the devil seems particularly busy. We never, we think, before had so many bad thoughts, so many wrong inclinations ; never felt so irritable or so disobliging as we have done since we resolved to be especially the Lord's servants. Now perhaps this is partly owing to our being on the watch for what is wrong, so that things which are unnoticed at other times are thought much of now. But it is doubtless in a measure true. Satan always struggles hardest when he sees us trying to escape his trammels. It was when our Lord was gone into the wilderness for prayer and fasting that he chose to assault Him, and he does just the same when he sees any of us particularly diligent in using the means of grace. But we may remember for our comfort, that though our

² Heb. iv. 16.

³ Heb. iv. 15.

Lord was tempted, He did not sin ; and though we are tempted, we need not yield. Satan can put wicked thoughts into our hearts, but he cannot oblige us to act upon them ; he can place sin before us, but he cannot make us commit it ; for greater is He that is for us than he who is against us ; and He has said, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Tuesday after First Sunday in Lent.

2 CORINTHIANS vi. 1, 2.

"We then, as workers together with Him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For He saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee : behold, now is the accepted time ; behold, now is the day of salvation.)"

THE verses which we have just read, and which have been selected by our Church, as part of the Epistle for the first Sunday in Lent, contain a warning which we all must acknowledge we very much require, for they bid us remember that "*Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.*" We have just entered upon a most solemn period of the year—a time when our Church requires of us serious self-examination, and sincere repentance,—a time when she earnestly calls upon her children to commence a new course of life. In what spirit have we begun it ? Have we made any endeavour to find out our faults ? And having discovered them, are we now determined through God's grace to fight against them ? Did we spend Ash-Wednesday in the way which our Church has appointed, not merely as to outward forms, but in the spirit ? And have we

already commenced a *special* attack upon our spiritual enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil? If not, what has been the cause of the delay?

Depend upon it the excuse, although we may not know it, has really been the same which Felix made when Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. He trembled, and said, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee".

We are waiting for a more convenient season. We should not indeed dare to say so in words, because we well know how uncertain life is, but in our heart of hearts, we do not think we are likely to die just yet, and we imagine that by and by it will be much easier to fight the good fight of faith than it is now.

But, why should it be easier? The longer we indulge our faults, the harder it will be to conquer them; because each time we give way to them, we give Satan an advantage over us; and we have every assistance which we can either expect or desire. St. Paul in these verses beseeches the Corinthians "not to receive the grace of God in vain," and this grace is also ours. The Saviour is as ready to work with us, as He was with St. Paul; He is as ready to succour us as He was the Corinthians, and to hear and accept us as He was them. We, like them, have been baptized into His Body. His Holy Spirit dwells in us as He did in them; and we are as much called upon to glorify God, in our body, and in our spirit, as they were; for we, like them, are "bought with a price," even the blood of God's own Son⁴.

And surely no better time can be found for thus commencing a new life, than this season, when we are called to contemplate our Saviour's dying love.

⁴ Acts xxiv. 25.

⁵ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

Well may our Church put this portion of Scripture at the very beginning of her Lenten Services, and tell us "now is the accepted time;" for if our hearts are not now warmed towards our Saviour, I know not when they will be. For now again and again is read to us the wondrous account of all His sufferings, and again and again we are taught that it was for us He bore them. For our sakes, He took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man; for us He encountered the devil in the Wilderness; for our sakes He submitted to scorn, and reproach, and for us He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross; and all the return He asks is our love and obedience. He asks us, like St. Paul, to give no offence in any thing, but to approve ourselves as the servants of God; and if this is our desire, He will hear and succour us: but if we let this season pass, as so many have done before, without producing any fruit, the time may come of which our Church told us, in her Service for Ash-Wednesday, when "they shall call upon Me, saith the Lord, but I will not hear; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me." May this never be our doom, but may we "seek the Lord while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near." May we at once "submit ourselves unto Him, and from henceforth walk in His ways, seeking always His glory, and serving Him duly in our vocation with thanksgiving."

⁶ Isa. lv. 6.

*Wednesday after first Sunday in Lent.***2 CORINTHIANS vi. 3—10.**

“Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: but in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”

If, through God’s grace, we are enabled to remember, “that now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation,” and to make a mighty effort during this season to devote ourselves more fully to His service, we shall soon find that we have undertaken no easy task, and we shall often feel that it is a hard duty to which we are called, and be inclined to shrink from it. We shall find it hard to keep a constant watch over ourselves, to deny our appetites, and to strive against our faults. We shall find it hard, when those around us are gaily conversing, discussing the characters of their neighbours, and blaming and ridiculing their conduct, to close our lips, because we are to speak evil of no man. It will be hard when others are fretting over some disappointment, to bear it patiently and cheerfully;

when we are treated unjustly, to submit meekly, and when we are spoken to peevishly or hastily, to remember that "a soft answer turneth away wrath". All this may appear very difficult to flesh and blood, and so it is. Our Saviour never gave us reason to suppose it would be otherwise. He tells us that the road to Heaven is a strait road ; and that those who follow Him will have a cross to bear. He teaches us that the life of a Christian is the life of a soldier and of a combatant, from the day of his Baptism to the day of his death.

But it is not all hard. Our Lord speaks of a yoke, but He tells us that that yoke is an easy one. He warns us that we shall have to carry a burden, but He teaches us that that burden is a light one ; and so will all those who are in earnest find it. Let us once get the love of the Lord Jesus in our hearts, once really believe we are working with Him and for Him, and we shall think little of any sacrifices we may be called upon to make. They may indeed seem difficult for the moment, but if we are enabled by His grace and for His sake to give up any thing we should like, to overcome any evil temper, or to resist any wrong inclination, we shall feel afterwards a peace which the world can neither give nor take away, and be ready to acknowledge that wisdom's "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace". Do we doubt whether this would really be the case ? Let us look at the account St. Paul gives of himself in the concluding verses of Sunday's Epistle, which we have just read. St Paul was by nature a man like ourselves ; he had doubtless the same feelings, the same dislike to pain and suffering, the same aversion to self-denial and privation, the same objection to watchfulness and care which we have. Yet all these he had to endure, for he tells us that, in order to approve himself as a minister of God, he had not only

⁷ Prov. xv. 1.

⁸ Prov. iii. 17.

to bear stripes, imprisonments, tumults, and labours; but he had to control his temper, and to be long-suffering, to put up with evil treatment, and yet to be kind, to go through evil report and good report, and yet love his enemies. And did all this make him very unhappy? Did he think the Christian's life a very hard one? Oh, no; he tells us that "though chastened, he was not killed; though sorrowful, he was always rejoicing; though he had nothing, he yet possessed all things."

And what was it that made Paul so happy? He himself tells us. The love of Christ constrained him. He did all things through Christ who strengthened him. And in this spirit must we enter upon our Lenten labours, not in our own strength or in dependence on our own resolutions, but with a stedfast recollection that we are the soldiers of Christ; that we are fighting in His cause, and under His eye; and that from His Throne of Glory He is beholding our struggles, and preparing for us that Crown which He has laid up for them that love His appearing. God grant that we may each and all obtain it; and let us not cease to pray that He will give us grace, during this season, "to use such abstinence, that our flesh being subdued to the spirit, we may ever obey His godly motions in righteousness and true holiness, for His Mercy's sake."

Thursday after First Sunday in Lent.

Read the nineteenth chapter of Genesis, from the first to the thirtieth verse, being the First Morning Lesson for the First Sunday in Lent.

MANY of the chapters, appointed by our Church to be read as lessons during Lent, seem to have been

chosen in order to show how much God hates sin ; and how sure He is to punish it, either in this world or the next, unless it is repented of.

Lent is the season of repentance ; and it is good for us to hear of the different ways in which we may offend God, in order that we may examine ourselves, and find out whether we are doing so ; and may turn back before it is too late. If, for instance, we are in the habit of giving way to the lusts of the flesh, it is well for us to be reminded of Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birth-right ; and who afterwards "found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."⁸ If deception be our besetting sin, we have the example of Jacob, who gained his father's blessing by a lie, and for years was an exile from his home. If obstinacy, we have the punishment of Pharaoh, who, after repeated warnings, hardened his heart, and perished miserably in the Red Sea ; and if covetousness, or caring too much for worldly gain is our snare, we may take warning by the account of Lot, which was read last Sunday morning.

Lot was Abraham's nephew, and we read that their flocks and herds having multiplied exceedingly, so that the land was not able to bear them that they might dwell together, Abraham told Lot the whole land was before him ; that if he took the left hand, then he would go to the right ; or if he departed to the right hand, then he would go to the left. Then Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, even as the garden of the Lord. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan, and pitched his tent toward Sodom ; but, adds the inspired historian, "the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." In fact, Lot chose his place of abode simply from its worldly advantages, without

once thinking whether or not it would be profitable for his soul.

How many of us are doing the same ! How constantly do we hear before any great change takes place in a person's life, such as entering a new situation, going to live in a new house, &c., discussions about the worldly advantages of the change,—whether the wages are good, the climate healthy, &c.,—but how rarely is any thing said as to spiritual advantages ! How seldom is the question asked, with any degree of earnestness,—Is this a place where my soul will gain good ? Is the work I have to do, are the people with whom I have to associate, such as will advance or hinder me in the road to Heaven ? And if we thus form our plans, without any reference to God, can we be surprised if He also neglects us, and causes us to find that, even as to worldly gain, we have made a wrong choice, and that by neglecting His command to seek "*first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*," we have failed to obtain His promise that all other things shall be added to us ?

Lot found it so : he never seems to have been happy in Sodom ; for St. Peter tells us, he was "*vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked*" ; but he still continued there, probably because he could not bear to give up the good grass and clear water for his flocks. And what was the end of all his care for them ? We heard the account of it last Sunday. They were all destroyed, and he, only too glad to escape with his life, left the place he had chosen to grow rich in, without one single thing which he could call his own. Of what avail was it to him then that his flocks had been fatter, his herds healthier than his neighbours' ? All were gone. And, oh, what will it avail us in that awful day when the fate of Sodom and Gomorrha shall come

¹ 2 Pet. ii. 7.

upon this world, when “the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up²,” to be able to say, I have accumulated so much wealth, I have enjoyed such and such pleasures? Truly nothing; all will be gone like Lot’s possessions. But it will avail us to be able to say, I have confessed my Saviour before men, and therefore humbly hope He will confess me now; I have, like Peter, left all in order to follow Him in this world, and I believe that according to His own promise He will grant me in the world to come everlasting life.

Friday after First Sunday in Lent.

LUKE xvii. 26—33.

“As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot’s wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.”

² 2 Pet. iii. 10.

IN noticing the lessons which are to be learnt from the history of Lot, we must not omit the one taught by our Lord Himself, when He bid His disciples “Remember Lot’s wife.”

The occasion when He spoke these words was when He was foretelling the troubles which would come upon them, after He had left them. He was warning them of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, and instructing them how they were to act when it took place. He told them not to consider their “stuff,” or as we should say, their property, but only to take heed to their lives. That if they were upon the housetop, and their goods inside, they were not even to go down to take possession of them, but to flee as fast as they could till they got out of Jerusalem ; and then He says, “Remember Lot’s wife.” She, like you, was warned to leave a devoted city ; but because she turned to cast a longing, lingering look at her worldly wealth, she was turned into a pillar of salt ; and in the same way will you perish, if you disregard My instructions. The disciples remembered their Saviour’s words, and we read in the account given by Josephus of the siege of Jerusalem, that great numbers of them were preserved, because they fled as soon as they saw the Roman armies.

But although our Lord first spoke these words in reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, they are equally applicable to the destruction of the world, and may serve as a warning to Christ’s disciples in every age. Indeed, in the account given by St. Matthew of this sermon of our Lord, it is very difficult to know where He ceases to speak of the one event, and begins to give warning of the other ; and some of the words which in St. Luke’s Gospel appear to refer to the destruction of the city, by St. Matthew are made to relate to the hour when our Lord shall come with power and great glory, and shall send His Angels to gather together His elect.

As the one event seemed improbable, so also does the other. The Jews had been so long God's chosen people, had so long known Him bear with their faults, and protect them against their enemies, that it must have been hard for them to imagine the time would come when He would turn His back upon them, and deliver them up to their foes. And it is hard for us to imagine that this fair world and all that is in it will really pass away like a scroll, and the elements melt with fervent heat. But our Saviour tells us the people of Sodom were equally incredulous—"they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded ; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed."

We, like Lot's wife, have received warning,—let us take heed that her fate is not ours. She was double-minded, and therefore unstable and wavering. She had set out with her husband, but she hung back, and looked fondly on that sinful city from which she was departing. She was fleeing from the punishment, but she was hankering after the pleasures of Sodom. How many of us are doing the same ! How many at such a season as this through which we are now passing are convinced that some habit in which they have been indulging is hindering them on their road to Heaven ! that something which they have neglected would help them on their way thither ! But how few make up their minds to act right at once ! Sudden changes are bad, they say, and provoke attention ; they will make the alteration gradually, will think about it. In short, they look back like Lot's wife ; and how do they know that her fate will not be theirs ? The same Lord who sent His Angel to warn Lot, has declared that He will come "as a thief in the night," and every day brings us nearer to that time. But if we do not live to see His appearance, we know that

we must stand before Him ; that death may come at any moment, and after death the judgment. Oh, then, let us remember Lot's wife ! Let us not trifle, let us not hesitate, but when we see our duty, act at once a decided part ; for, as the Epistle for this week so solemnly warns us, " Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation ! "

Saturday after First Sunday in Lent.

Read the twenty-second chapter of Genesis, being the First Evening Lesson for the First Sunday in Lent.

In the history of Lot's wife, which was read in the first Lesson for last Sunday morning, we had an instance of wavering and disobedience to God ; in the one for the evening, which contains the history of Abraham's trial in the offering up of Isaac, we have an instance of prompt obedience to His commands. The one may serve as a warning, the other as an example. Let us observe the points of resemblance and of contrast.

Both commands were hard to obey. It was difficult for Lot's wife to resolve to leave her happy home, to bid good-bye to her friends and acquaintance, to leave all her possessions, and to go out as a wanderer upon the face of the earth ; and it was indeed hard for Abraham to be told that his own hand must cause the death of the child he loved dearer than life itself.

Both commands were difficult to believe. It must have been difficult for Lot and his family to believe that that fair city, where they had so long lived, with all its population and possessions, was to be in one night reduced to a mere desert ; and

it must have been very difficult for Abraham to imagine that that child whom God Himself had given him, was by his own act to become a lifeless corpse.

Both commands came direct from God, and both Lot's wife and Abraham seem to have been fully aware that they did.

And here resemblance ends and the contrast between them begins. Once convinced of this fact, once satisfied that hard and improbable as it appeared, God did indeed require the sacrifice of his son's life, Abraham hesitated not a moment. He took no counsel, he asked no advice, but early in the morning he set off to do as he was commanded, taking with him all that was necessary for the execution of the awful deed ; whilst Lot's wife, though equally certain of her duty, and possibly intending all the time to perform it, hesitated, procrastinated, looked back, and waited until it was too late.

Dear friends, which of these two do we resemble ? The season of Lent, as we were yesterday observing, is one very likely to convince us of new duties. When we are in some degree separated from the world ; when we are devoting some additional time to our religious occupations, the voice of God is very likely to speak to our hearts, and to make our conscience whisper, "Such and such a thing that you have been doing is very wrong ; such and such a thing which you have hitherto neglected ought to be attended to." If this happens, how are we about to act ? Are we going to doubt, and reason, and consult, and reflect, until the impression is past ? If so, I fear, as the Epistle for last Sunday tells us, we shall "have received the grace of God in vain," and shall find, like Lot's wife, that the accepted time is past. No ; if we are satisfied that God has spoken to us, whether it be, as is often the case, by the voice of His ministers, making us feel that what is recommended in a sermon is our

duty; or in the retirement of the closet, coming across us as a flash of lightning, we know not how; let us, like Abraham, act at once; don't let us be satisfied with any purpose, however good, with any resolutions, however sincere, but let us set about doing what we know is right. It may be hard to perform: so was the command given to Abraham. It may bring scorn and derision upon us: so would his intention, had it been known. But this is not our concern. The only question for us to ask is, Is it right? If it is, we may be sure God will help us. He made a way of escape for Abraham at the very darkest moment; and if in simple dependence upon Him we go forward in the path of duty, He will make our way plain to us. He never forsakes those who trust in Him. It is only those who choose their own course that He leaves to their own devices. If He sees us willing to give up all for Him, and like Abraham to obey His voice, He will bless us as He did Abraham; and will make us feel like St. Paul, that "though we have nothing, we yet possess all things."

Second Sunday in Lent.

1 THESSALONIANS iv. 1, 2.

"We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus."

THE Epistle for to-day begins with an exhortation from the Apostle Paul to his disciples at Thessalonica, that as they had received of him how they ought to walk, and to please God, so they would abound more

and more. We have had during the last few weeks four Epistles taken from the writings of St. Paul, so that we, like the Thessalonians, know very well the commandments he has given; for though he was before addressing the Corinthians, doubtless his instructions would be the same in one place as in the other.

He would teach them both to be temperate in all things; to keep under their bodies, and bring them into subjection; to suffer long, and be kind; to bear all things, hope all things, and endure all things, for the sake of Christ; and he would set the same example to the Thessalonians as he did to the Corinthians. But he now proceeds to tell them *why* it is that they are bound to *obey* his commands and to follow his example. It was because he acted not in his own name and by his own authority, but only "in the name of the Lord Jesus." This is a point upon which St. Paul is always most careful to insist; he always impresses upon his converts that he only wishes them to imitate him so far as he imitates Christ, and that he only desires them to submit to his authority because he has received that authority from Him. Hence he beseeches and exhorts in the name of the Lord Jesus those who have received apostolical instructions from himself; the commandments which he had given them, he declares to have been given by or through the Lord Jesus, that is, under His guidance and with His authority.

We may well call to mind this reference to the source of all authority, especially at this season of the year, when we are trying more than usual to follow the teaching and obey the rules of our Church. That Church has power to decree rites and ceremonies, as St. Paul had of old. It is true that our ministers have not the same gifts of the Spirit as St. Paul had, for we do not see them work miracles, but they are Christ's ambassadors as well as he; and we must believe this if we believe the Bible to be true.

It is evident St. Paul did not think the authority of ministers was confined to the Apostles, for in writing to Titus, he bids him "exhort and rebuke with all authority, and to let no man despise him;" and Timothy he tells to command and teach, and yet (so far as we know) neither Titus nor Timothy had seen our Lord, but had received their commission from the hands of St. Paul. But he even went further, for he not only gave them power to teach, but he deputed them to transmit this power to others; for to Titus he says, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee³." And to Timothy, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also⁴."

Now if Timothy and Titus had this authority, why might not their successors have it too? and why may it not have continued to the present time? There is no reason against it; but if it be so, it is wrong for us to think little of our ministers and the rules of our Church. Rather let us recognize in the instructions we thus receive, the instructions of our Lord and Master. In His Name His ministers speak, and so long as they faithfully deliver His message they are to be honoured and obeyed. In the present case we have abundant reason for believing that our Church rules are both wise and scriptural. May we find by practical experience at the end of Lent, that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams⁵!"

³ Titus i. 5.

⁴ 2 Tim. ii. 2.

⁵ 1 Sam. xv. 22.

Monday after Second Sunday in Lent.

1 THESSALONIANS iv. 3—8.

“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: that no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us His Holy Spirit.”

HAVING seen yesterday the authority, by which St. Paul claimed obedience, let us this morning consider in what way his authority was exercised, and what particular duties he urged upon his newly-made converts. They may all be comprised in one word, —“sanctification,” or “holiness;” and if we turn from his Epistle to the Thessalonians to his letters to the other Churches, we shall find similar admonitions. Thus, when writing to the Corinthians, he says, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” To the Ephesians, “Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness⁷;” and to the Hebrews, still more emphatically, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord⁸.”

But St. Paul not only urges in a general way the importance of “holiness,” but in every one of his Epistles he enters into the most minute details of

⁶ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

⁷ Eph. iv. 24.

⁸ Heb. xii. 14.

a Christian's life, and teaches his converts how to conduct themselves as husbands and wives, as parents and children, as masters, and as servants. He knew, indeed, that a good tree will bring forth good fruit; but he also knew that in this fallen world of ours few fruits attain perfection without constant care, training, and watchfulness; and, therefore, whilst he never forgot to tell his converts, as he does in the verses just read, that it was "God who had called them to holiness," or ceased to remind them of that "Holy Spirit which He had given them," he also continually impressed upon them the necessity of exertion, and exhorted them to "work out their own salvation." Neither does he seem to think they can at once attain unto a "perfect man," but rather instructs them how to grow, to be strengthened, and "to press forward."

Let us bear this in mind, especially in the season through which we are now passing. Let us exercise ourselves in all those duties which belong to us as Christians called of God unto holiness, that we may by practice become more at home in the warfare in which we are engaged, more able to resist temptation, and to repel the fiery darts of the wicked one, that we may, in short, "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

But if Lent is thus to be a season of improvement, it must also be a season of deep searchings of heart, and serious self-examination; and it would be well if each week we took for this purpose the particular duty which is brought forward in the Sunday Services, and tried to find out how far we have fulfilled it; for every undiscovered and unrepented sin is like a heavy weight, which hinders the Christian on his road towards Heaven.

This week the duty of purity is impressed upon us both in the First Lesson for the Evening, and in the Epistle. It is one upon which every Christian who values his own soul ought most seriously

to examine himself, constantly bearing in mind that the seventh Commandment, like all the others, extends to the innermost thoughts of the heart, and that, though we may be outwardly free from crime, yet if we are indulging impure thoughts, joining in indecent conversation, or falling into light conduct and immodesty, we are offending Him, who has called us not to uncleanness, but unto holiness.

Let us also remember, that that Holy Spirit, which God has given us, dwells in our bodies, or as they are here called, our vessel ; that He will most assuredly depart from us if we use those bodies as the means of sin ; and that if He withdraws His gracious influence, vain will be all our attempts to please God, or to abound more and more in holiness. Let us, then, dread the slightest approach to uncleanness, in thought, in word, or in deed ; and let the advice of St. Paul to his Philippian converts be constantly in our minds, and form at this season the standard by which to examine ourselves. " Brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report,"—do ; and " the God of peace shall be with you⁹."

Tuesday after Second Sunday in Lent.

MATTHEW xv. 21—28.

" Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David ; my daughter is grievously vexed with a

⁹ Phil. iv. 8, 9.

devil. But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me. But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

OUR attention is especially directed at this season to our Saviour's personal warfare with the prince of this world—the Devil.

Last week we considered, and meditated upon, his attacks upon our Saviour Himself. In the stillness and solitude of the desert, away from men, and with no human eyes upon Him, our great Captain fought, as it were, hand to hand with the enemy, and overcame. Powerless were all the attacks of the Evil One upon Him who was perfectly holy. But the contest was not then finished, nor will it be finished until all the redeemed of the Lord are safely gathered into their eternal home, where no temptations can reach them; and until those who have chosen the devil's portion and service have departed to that everlasting fire, prepared for him and for his angels.

At the time of our Saviour's ministry upon earth, the devil appears to have been permitted to have a power over men which he has not had, at least over Christians, since He, by His death upon the cross, bruised the serpent's head. We hear of those who were vexed by the devil, possessed by the devil, grievously tormented by the devil; and from what we read about them, it seems, that the devil so

entered into them, as to make them his own property, body as well as soul, and sometimes rendered them almost like himself.

Upon these wretched, unhappy creatures, our Saviour exercised His power. He "was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil¹," and no sooner were these victims of the Evil One in the presence of the Saviour, than the spirits which were in them acknowledged Him to be the Lord, the Holy One of God, and resigned a possession they could not maintain before Him whom they knew to be stronger than themselves.

In our time the power of the devil is exercised in a different way. We cannot take up a common newspaper without our eye being caught by accounts of sin and depravity which make us shudder as we read—husbands murdering their wives; mothers destroying their helpless children; men plotting each other's death in cold blood. We feel horrified and disgusted at the details, and exclaim, "Surely this man, or this woman, must have been possessed by the devil." And so, no doubt, they are. They have so given themselves up to the enemy of their souls, that he makes them work his will; and takes them (unless it please God to give them repentance for their crimes) for his own property, for this world and the next.

But whilst we are dwelling upon this awful subject, is there no practical lesson to be learnt for ourselves? How have these wretched ones, who seem only to delight in evil, fallen under the power of the devil? Not, we may believe, by a sudden attack or a violent temptation, but by little and little. The devil is from the beginning represented as a serpent, and subtle; and he works his way with mankind, warily tempting them at first to small sins, and to what appear slight transgressions, that he may thus harden the conscience and prepare the way for more desperate attacks. Thus the child who

¹ 1 John iii. 8.

takes but a lump of sugar, knowing he is stealing, is committing a wilful sin ; so are they who are living in enmity, open or secret, with any fellow-creature, or who are indulging passion, malice, envy, or the like.

We are told, "he that committeth sin, is of the devil²," and if we once place ourselves in his power, who can say where, or how, we may stop ? The devil's paths are smooth and easy, and tempting at the beginning ; and it is an awful thought, that we may at this time be treading those paths ; that by giving way to an inclination to evil, we are giving him a power over us, which he may not give up till he has made us his slaves in this world and the sharers of his doom for eternity.

Let us, then, be on our guard against the very beginnings of evil, and watch against the least known sin, remembering that to give way to it is to open the doors to the enemy, and to make one welcome who can ruin our souls.

It ought to be part of our Lenten work to find out where our weakness lies, and against that point our best efforts should be directed. We have a great Captain who has fought for us, and who still fights in us, and He has provided armour for us, and weapons to use, whereby we may destroy all the fiery darts of the devil.

But we must not be discouraged if we do not overcome at once. Let us remember the example of the Canaanitish woman. Three times she appealed to our Lord on behalf of her daughter ; and three times He repulsed her, and turned a deaf ear to her supplication. Still she persevered, and the fourth time she was successful. "O woman, great is thy faith : be it unto thee even as thou wilt," saith our Lord ; "and her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

And just in the same way may we seem to be struggling to turn the devil out of our hearts, to get

² 1 John iii. 8.

rid of the demons of pride, passion, or malice, which possess us. The more we try, the worse we may seem to be ; but let us go on in humble dependence on our Saviour, and in the end we shall be “more than conquerors through Him that loved us³.” He may appear to be regardless of our cry, but He is really listening to our prayers, and watching our efforts ; and when we have shown, like the Canaanitish woman, that we have faith to persevere, He will say to us, as He did to her, “ Be it unto thee even as thou wilst.”

Wednesday after Second Sunday in Lent.

GENESIS xxv. 29—34.

“ And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: and Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.”

HEBREWS xii. 16, 17.

“ Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birth-

³ Rom. viii. 37.

right. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

THE verses which we have just read are the introduction to the account of Esau and Jacob, which was the first lesson last Sunday morning, and form a clue to Jacob's conduct on that occasion.

We see from them why it was that Jacob thought he had a right to his father's blessing, and therefore resolved to obtain it by any means. This blessing was connected with the birthright which Esau sold to him; and so he thought Esau had no right to get back the blessing, after having parted with the birthright. When we come to consider the lesson itself, we shall see how wrong it was of Jacob to take the matter into his own hands, instead of committing it to God. We are not called upon to-day to consider Jacob's conduct, but we must take the lesson St. Paul teaches, when he warns us not to imitate Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. We are not very plainly told what the birthright was; but it is generally supposed one great part was being the ancestor of the Messiah; and to this Isaac seems to refer when he says, "Blessed be he that blesseth thee; and cursed be every one that curseth thee." At all events, we know the eldest son had great privileges, and these Esau sold for a mess of pottage. It seems hardly credible that any one should make so foolish a choice; and yet is not the same scene acted day by day?

We, like Esau, have a birthright. It was bestowed upon us at our Baptism, that is, when we were made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of Heaven. A gift was also then bestowed, to enable us to maintain our portion in these privileges, and that gift was none other than God's Holy Spirit.

But, alas ! how many like Esau have despised their birthright ? God's Word tells us plainly, we "cannot serve God and Mammon⁴ ;" we must decide between the two ; and how many have chosen, like Esau, the mess of pottage ?

We have had the offer of an advantageous situation ; and though we knew it was one which was perilous for our souls, we have decided to accept it. Is not this acting like Esau ? Or a scheme of pleasure has been proposed ; and though we knew we could not properly join it, because it interfered with other duties, we have been resolved to gratify our inclination rather than obey our conscience ; never considering that, like Esau's mess of pottage, the enjoyment would soon be gone ; whilst, like him, we should run a great risk of losing a portion of our great birthright, that is, God's Holy Spirit, by refusing to listen to His voice.

Some may think such a thing as this a trifle, but nothing is trifling which hardens our conscience. Esau's was a temptation in a very trifling matter, yet it made him commit a very great sin ; and just in the same way, if we accustom ourselves to give way to self-indulgence in small matters, we shall be unable to deny ourselves in great ones. The Bible says, " He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy⁵ ." Now every time our conscience speaks, it is God's Holy Spirit reproving us for sin ; and if we harden ourselves against it, we provoke Him to withdraw Himself from us, and thus lose part of our birthright, or the gift which was given us at our second birth.

Esau does not appear to have thought what he was doing when for one morsel of meat he sold his birthright ; at any rate, he was very sorry for it afterwards, though his repentance was then of no avail. And little does that boy think what he is

⁴ Matt. vi. 24.

⁵ Prov. xxix. 1.

about who boldly joins his bad companions in their games, unmindful of the little voice within which bids him keep away from them. Little does the servant think what she is about who stays out after the lawful hour, unmindful of the voice which bids her obey her master in all things. Little does the man think what he is doing who enters the alehouse door, intending to take but one glass, but feeling an uncomfortable conviction that he had better stay away altogether, lest he should be induced to take more. Little, in fact, do we, any of us, think what we are doing when we resist the warning voice within, and choose, like Esau, present gratification instead of duty. The time will certainly come, if we so continue, when like him we shall find no place of repentance, though "we seek it carefully with tears."

It is in assisting us to guard against this wretched fate that Lent is valuable. It is a season especially appointed for practising self-denial, in order that we may be the better prepared to resist temptation. May we be enabled to use it aright, and may we so grow in self-control, that when temptation comes we may bravely endure it, and be ready to give up any worldly advantage rather than part with our birthright of being members of Christ and children of God !

Thursday after Second Sunday in Lent.

Read the twenty-seventh chapter of Genesis, being the First Lesson for last Sunday morning.

AFTER Esau had sold his birthright to Jacob for a mess of pottage, as we read yesterday, some time appears to have elapsed, in which nothing particular happened to the two brothers, and perhaps the whole

transaction may almost have passed from Esau's mind. Every thing went on as usual. The family moved about from place to place, dug wells, entertained friends, sowed seed, received for it a hundred-fold, grew very great, and were the envy of all around them. It may be, no one knew what had passed excepting themselves, so of course Esau received all the privileges and honours of an eldest son ; the servants treated him with respect, his father with marked affection : all was bright around him, and possibly if he thought of the birthright at all, it was to scorn Jacob for attaching so much importance to a thing of so little consequence.

But a day of retribution came at last, as we read in Sunday's lesson. Isaac wished to give his sons his blessing before he died, for he was growing very old, and this blessing Esau seems most earnestly to have desired. But Jacob, by the help of his mother, succeeded in imposing on his father, and inducing him to bestow it upon his youngest son in too solemn a manner ever to be recalled. Then began Esau's sorrow. He pleaded, entreated, threatened, even wept, but all was in vain ; his day of grace was past ; the deed was done ; and, after all, why did he feel it so bitterly ? The birthright was the same as when he scornfully asked, "What profit shall this birthright do to me ?" Why then did he utter the exceeding bitter cry, "Bless me, even me also, O my father ?" Because he himself was differently situated.

When he sold his birthright, he was faint and hungry, and the mess of pottage seemed the most delicious thing in the world ; now the pleasure of eating it was long past, and the recollection only brought disgust. He could hardly imagine that for such a trifle he could give up any advantage, and abhorred the very thought of it.

Dear friends, there are many Esaus now. God grant we may never be of their number !

The indulgences for which we give up our birth-right may seem more desirable now than a mess of pottage ; but how shall we regard them on our dying bed ? Will the public-house, the gaming-room, the haunt of iniquity, for the sake of which many a young man has given up all claim to be called an inheritor of the kingdom of Heaven, look any better to him then than Esau's mess of pottage ? Will dress, and vanity, and admiration, and amusement any longer satisfy the dying girl than his mess of pottage did him ? We all feel they will not, and yet day by day we go on making Esau's choice.

But it is not only a death-bed which will make us resemble him. A very few hours must have sufficed to show him his folly. The next time he was hungry he must have repented of what he had done, but probably he put away the remembrance, and tried to think no more of it, and to hope it was of no consequence. And just so do we often act. A very little reflection convinces us, that the pleasure we have enjoyed is not worth the price we have given : even the next morning makes the remembrance of last night's sin distasteful, but we try not to think about it, and hope it will not signify ; and so God's Spirit, which has been grieved, does not return, and our hearts grow harder and harder, until at last the day of grace is gone for ever.

Let us be Esau's no longer. Lent is specially a time for self-abasement, let us make use of it ; and if in any thing our conscience accuses us, let us not act as he did, and stifle reflection, but, like David, confess our sins before God, and He will forgive us our iniquity.

Friday after Second Sunday in Lent.

PSALM xxxvii. 3—5. 7.

“Trust in the Lord, and do good ; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord ; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord ; trust also in Him ; and He shall bring it to pass. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him ; fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.”

BEFORE we leave the subject of Jacob and Esau, we must endeavour to discover how far the conduct of Jacob was right or wrong, and what practical lessons we may learn from it.

Jacob had substantial reasons for desiring the blessing and the birthright. It was a good and holy thing which he coveted, and his eagerness to possess it showed that he was not without faith ; for had not Jacob believed the promises of God about the coming Saviour, he would not have cared whether the birthright belonged to him or no. So far therefore he is worthy of imitation.

But here the example ends, and the warning begins.

Though Jacob had reason for desiring the blessing, the means he took to obtain it were certainly wrong. It was wrong to take advantage of his brother's necessities, and to gain the birthright by means of his sin : still more wrong to deceive his father about it ; and worst of all, to add to his deceit the cloke of religion, which he did when he said, “The Lord thy God brought the venison to me.”

How different would have been Jacob's fate if he had left the matter in God's hands ; and how differ-

ent is the course of the believer, who is enabled to commit his way unto the Lord, from the course of one who feels (or acts as if he felt) that all depends upon himself!

And yet this is what we are all apt to do. We are all too ready to take the affairs of our lives into our own hands, and to act as if every thing depended on our own exertions, instead of remembering that every thing, the smallest as well as the greatest, is ordered by God, and that He is just as well able to work without our help as with it. The Apostle tells us that their "damnation is just" who say, "Let us do evil that good may come⁶;" and this is a precept which should constantly be remembered in our daily lives. Our part is simply to do our duty, and to leave results with God. We must not try to gain ever so good an object by unlawful means; for if we do, although our end may seemingly be attained, we shall have injured our own souls, and lost our influence over others. Jacob obtained the blessing, but he gained the hatred instead of the respect of his brother: and so the Christian who uses deceit or artifice will always be despised; and if, through God's mercy, he finally obtains his birthright, that is, his inheritance in Heaven, he will have been made, like Jacob, to feel his sin on earth, and to repent of it before it is too late.

Saturday after Second Sunday in Lent.

1 CORINTHIANS x. 11—13.

"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Where-

⁶ Rom. iii. 8.

fore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

THE verses which we have just read ought to be constantly in our mind during Lent; for in all the lessons appointed to be read throughout this season, we have "ensamples written for our admonition;" and they teach us what use we should make of them. They are intended to warn us (St. Paul tells us) against presumption and against despair. Against presumption: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall:" and against despair: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Let us then, under the guidance of the Apostle, review the ensamples which have been given us this week, and see how far we have profited by them.

We have in Esau the type of the careless, profane sinner, caring all for present ease and gratification, and giving no thought to the future. In Jacob, the type of one who is unable to see how any thing can come right unless he has the management and ordering of it, and therefore does evil that good may come. In Rebecca we have the type of the dissembler, who takes crooked paths to secure a good end. In the history of Dinah, we have examples of other sins; in herself, of unsteadiness and its consequence; in her brothers, of revenge and perfidy; in Shechem, of unbridled passion and covetousness;—what an array of iniquity! and yet all written for our admonition!

If we are passing Lent aright, we shall spend some part of it in self-examination; and it may be that on hearing this list, we may be ready to ex-

claim, "Well, thank God, I am not so bad a sinner as these are! I cannot, even after the most rigid self-scrutiny, accuse myself of having given way to such sins as these." Well, if it be so, let us indeed thank God who has preserved us; but let us rejoice with trembling, and take heed lest we fall. It is no part of a Christian's duty to accuse himself of sins which he has not committed, but it *is* part of his duty to take warning by the examples of others, which were written for his admonition. Some of those whose failings have this week been recorded, were, notwithstanding their shortcomings, children of God, and beloved by Him; and if they failed, so also may we. They failed through giving way to their besetting sins: this season of Lent is set apart that we may make a special effort to overcome ours. Having first, by self-examination, ascertained what our besetting sin is, we must try our very best to get the better of it.

But it may be that on some minds these "examples" may have a different effect. They may be discouraged by them. They may say, "If Jacob, and Rebecca, chosen servants of God, with whom He talked face to face, fell into such sin, what is to hold me up?" Just that, dear brethren, which would have kept them safe if they had sought it, even God's grace. Left to ourselves, we shall be no better than they; but God is faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear. He may seem sometimes to leave us to ourselves, and to turn a deaf ear to our prayer, as He did to the Canaanitish woman we read about in last Sunday's Gospel; but if we persevere, He will say to us as He did to her, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt," and will show us "a way to escape" sin.

Third Sunday in Lent.

EPHESIANS v. 1—14.

“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children ; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints ; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient : but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words : for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord : walk as children of light : (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light : for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.”

It is very beautiful to notice in what a tender manner our Church addresses her children during the season of Lent. It seems as if those who arranged her services had constantly borne in mind the hard work in which we are now engaged ; as if they had always remembered how difficult a thing it

is to practise self-denial, and to repent of and turn from our sins, and had wished to cheer us on our road by selecting those portions of Scripture in which St. Paul speaks most gently; and in which he brings before us the most constraining motives for obedience. "We then, as workers together with Him (that is, Christ), *beseech you* that ye receive not the grace of God in vain," says he, in the Epistle appointed for the first Sunday in Lent; "We *beseech you*, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus," is his language in that which is read on the second Sunday; and in the one for to-day, he is yet more tender and persuasive, for he begins by reminding us of our relationship to God, and of all that our Saviour has done for us. He calls us "dear children," and tells us that "Christ hath loved us, and given Himself for us," and after pointing out some of the ways in which we can show our gratitude to Him, he reminds us of what we once were, and of what through God's mercy we are now become, "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord," and bids us "walk as children of light."

Now although these words were written to the Ephesians many centuries ago, they are just as applicable to us now as they were to believers then; for if Christ had not come to give us light, we should still have been in the condition of the people of Ephesus, when they cried, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians;" or as those of our own land, when they fell down and worshipped the mistletoe; and therefore we with them are equally bound to show our gratitude and love.

Love is to be shown by obedience to God's commands, as we may see by the very title by which we are addressed, that of "dear children;" for how do affectionate children show their love to an earthly parent? Not chiefly or generally by talking about it, and pouring forth protestations of attachment,

but by striving to fulfil his slightest wishes, and endeavouring to please him in all their actions. And so must we behave towards our heavenly Father. It matters little that we call Him, "Lord, Lord," unless we *do* the things which He says. If our hearts are really filled with gratitude to our Saviour for having given Himself as an offering for us, we shall strive to show that gratitude by following or imitating Him not only in great things, but in the every-day duties of life. We shall strive to walk in love, that is, to be loving, and kind, and gentle, to all who are around us ; and we shall rejoice to think that although it may not be in our power to do any great deed, yet for Christ's sake our smallest services are accepted. A wise father does not expect the same tasks from each of his children, but gives to each their portion, according to their age and ability ; and so does God deal with us. He has appointed our lot in life, has given us each duties to perform, which we cannot properly delegate to another ; and it is in the performance of those duties, be they great or small, that we are to be followers of Him. It is not the greatness of the service, but the spirit which actuates it, to which He looks, and which He will reward. The child who cheerfully gives up a holiday, because his parents wish him to remain at home, is a follower of Christ, for He went down with His parents to Nazareth, and was subject unto them. The servant who refrains from a saucy answer is a follower of Him, for when He was reviled He reviled not again. Those who strive to comfort others are followers of Him, for He wept over the grave of Lazarus. Those who willingly perform little offices of kindness are followers of Him, for He washed His disciples' feet ; and all these things are, as the Epistle tells us, fruits of the Spirit, and, as such, "acceptable unto the Lord."

Monday after Third Sunday in Lent.

EPHESIANS v. 3—7.

“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them.”

WE yesterday considered some of the ways in which we might follow God, as “dear children;” let us this morning see what St. Paul tells us to avoid if we would walk as “children of light.” He gives a list of sins upon which he warns us “the wrath of God will come.” What are they? “Fornication, all uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting.” It seems a strange catalogue, and we are ready to exclaim, “Surely all these things cannot be equally bad, and equally to be avoided.”

In one sense they are not, for we all must admit that the murderer, or the adulterer, is more dangerous to his fellow-creatures; and also that he is more hardened in sin, more given up to the power of the devil, and therefore less likely to turn and repent than he who transgresses with his tongue.

But in one respect they are both alike. They are both transgressing the laws of God, and so proving their want of love to Him, for “this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.” They are

7 1 John v. 3.

neither of them acting as "dear children," though one may be erring from hardness of heart, the other from mere thoughtlessness ; for a really affectionate child will strive to please his parents in small things as well as great ; and it is quite sufficient to induce him to forego any gratification if he can say, "My father or my mother has forbidden it."

Now it may seem to us a very small matter to give way to a fit of anger ; to raise a scandalous report ; to listen to an ill-natured tale ; or to provoke those around us to wrath ; and we may never even think we have done any thing wrong ; but when we remember that He who said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," "Thou shalt not steal," "Thou shalt not kill," said also, "Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment⁸ ;" "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged⁹ ;" "Let your communication be, Yea, yea ; Nay, nay¹ ;" and, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people² ;" the matter assumes a different aspect.

The fact is, there is no such thing as a little sin, for if we knowingly do wrong, we are transgressing the law of God, and not acting as His children. Adam might think it a little sin to eat the forbidden fruit, but the consequence was death. Moses might think it a little sin to smite the rock, instead of speaking to it, but he was punished by not being permitted to enter the promised land.

Such thoughts as these are especially useful at a season like Lent,—a season which has been set apart for us to think upon our sins, to repent of them and to turn from them ; for we are very likely to be, as St. Paul tells the Ephesians, "deceived with vain words." It is hardly probable that we have fallen into gross sins, that we are murderers, fornicators, or

⁸ Matt. v. 22.

¹ Matt. v. 37.

⁹ Luke vi. 37.

² Lev. xix. 16.

thieves ; and therefore when we examine ourselves, we are apt to imagine we are very good kind of people. But let us beware. St. Paul not only says that " no unclean person shall enter the kingdom of God," but that " no covetous man shall have an inheritance therein :" he tells us that the wrath of God comes, not only on gross sinners, but on disobedient children ; and warns us to abstain, not only from fornication, but from foolish talking. If we find, then, on examination, that through God's mercy we are free from gross sin, let not this puff us up, but rather humble us, by leading us to remember, that though we have been kept from great temptations, we may be impure in His sight, like those whom we consider grievous sinners ; and let us ask Him to enable us to overcome our little faults, and especially sins of the tongue, lest for these things His wrath should come upon us.

Tuesday after Third Sunday in Lent.

LUKE xi. 14—26 (being part of the Gospel for Third Sunday).

" Jesus was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake ; and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils. And others, tempting Him, sought of Him a sign from heaven. But He, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation ; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand ? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out ? therefore shall they be your judges.

But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with Me is against Me: and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first."

In the verses we have just read, which are part of the Gospel for last Sunday, we have another instance of demoniacal possession, and of the Saviour's power over the devil; but this time our attention is directed, not so much to the miracle itself, as to the effect which it produced on the Jews.

They could not deny that a wonderful work had been wrought; for there stood the man who had been healed, a man well known to them all as one who for years had been dumb, and yet now he was able to speak; and they themselves had witnessed the manner in which he had been cured; but as they could not deny the power of our Lord, they chose to revile His goodness, and to declare that the devil himself enabled Him to cast out devils.

With His usual calmness and love, our Lord strove to show the absurdity of this proposition, by asking them how they imagined such a divided kingdom would stand, and how Satan's work could prosper if he himself helped to overthrow it? and then told them that such works as He had just wrought were

the great proofs of His being really the promised Messiah, because they showed that He was stronger than the devil. He tells them that hitherto Satan had kept his palace (that is, the world) in peace, but now He was come, the armour, wherein the devil trusted, would be taken from him, and his spoils divided. In effect He told them that now was the time when He would bruise the serpent's head, as had been promised to Adam³; and warned them not to take part with him, lest their last state should be worse than the first.

This warning is also needed by us. We should indeed be very much shocked to be classed with these blasphemers of our Lord, but we often fall in a small degree into their sin; for how very ready we are to ascribe bad motives to good actions! When one whom we have known as a light, careless trifler becomes more thoughtful and serious, goes regularly to church, or receives the Holy Communion, how apt we are to attribute the change to some worldly reason, to fancy he wishes to please some one from whom he expects advancement; to obtain some lucrative situation, or at best to suppose he is influenced by a passing enthusiasm, which will soon be over and done with! How seldom do we at once thank God on his behalf, and pray that this beginning of good may increase and abound in him!

Or, again, when we hear or read of any remarkable work of the Spirit, how very ready we are to doubt if it be indeed of God! how willing to lay hold of any mark of folly or enthusiasm, and to exclaim, "This is not religion!" We may be right, for Satan himself sometimes is transformed into an angel of light, but why should we be so eager to suppose it is not God's doing? Why be so willing to condemn? The counsel of Gamaliel to the Jews may well be

³ Gen. iii. 15.

applied to this matter, "Let it alone, for if this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God".

We must be very careful how we attribute any change of life to Satanic agency, for Satan cannot fight against Satan; and if a drunkard becomes sober, a liar truthful, a trifler thoughtful, they are fighting against him. They may be again overcome, and be even worse than they were before, but it is not for us to throw impediments in their way. Let us be as jealous as we please of ourselves, but let us be cautious how we quench the Spirit in others; let us rather try to fan the smoking flax into a flame, and pray that He who has begun a good work in them will also finish it; and let us especially beware of doubting its existence, lest we fall under that awful condemnation with which St. Matthew tells us our Saviour ended this discourse, "Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come".

Wednesday after Third Sunday in Lent.

Read again the eleventh chapter of Luke, fourteenth to twenty-sixth verses, being part of the Gospel for last Sunday (the same as yesterday).

How are you and I, dear friends, spending this season of Lent? Are we using it for the purposes of self-examination, of repentance, and of amendment? If we are, we must ere now have discovered we are engaged in no easy task.

⁴ Acts v. 38, 39.

⁵ Matt. xii. 32.

It may be that on Ash-Wednesday, whilst examining ourselves, we discovered that there was some fault to which we were especially prone. It, perhaps, was what the world calls a little sin, but we knew it often brought disgrace on our Christian profession ; and we resolved, through God's grace, to overcome it. Perhaps it might be impatience, irritability, fretfulness, passion, or evil-speaking, but whatever it was, we felt it was wrong, and resolved, that through Lent, at any rate, we would not give way to it. It seemed to give strength to our resolutions to have a fixed time to try in, and we pleased ourselves with the idea that when Easter came we should be able honestly to say, "We had never once given way to our besetting sin," and that by that time we should have got such a habit of resisting it, that it would give us no more trouble.

For a few days all went on well, we were watchful and prayerful, and began to think we were really gaining a victory, but suddenly temptation came, and we fell. We were conscious of it a moment afterwards, and bitterly repented having yielded ; but we comforted ourselves by thinking it was only once ; next time we would be more upon our guard. But again we were tried, and again we failed ; and again and again, until we marvel how it is, that now, when we are struggling to release ourselves from Satan's chains, we should seem to be more than ever under his power.

An answer to both these questions may be found in the Gospel for last Sunday. Our Saviour in it compares the devil to a strong man armed, and tells us that so long as he keeps his palace, his goods are in peace. This was our case. So long as we quietly yielded to our besetting sin, Satan let us have peace, for he felt that his goods were safe ; but when we began to resist it, he roused himself for the fight, lest he should be despoiled. But strong though he may be, there is One stronger still. Our Saviour, when

He was on earth, was able to conquer Satan, and to drive him out of those of whom he had possession ; and He is not weaker now. He is sure to help us, for He Himself tells us, that "a house divided against a house falleth ;" and that "he that is not with Me is against Me." We of His household are with Him when we are fighting against our faults, and therefore we may be certain He will not be divided from us. Only we must not give up. A soldier who is attacking an enemy's citadel is not discouraged by a repulse. He expects it, and would think the place of small value were it not defended ; and we must not be discouraged at our failures. We are attacking the strong man in his own palace, and he is sure to try to drive us away ; but if in our Saviour's strength we persevere, we shall find in the end we are able to resist him.

But we must not be too sanguine, even if we seem to gain a victory. Our Lord tells us, that even after the unclean spirit is driven out, he is liable to return ; and so it often is now. Sometimes people go on very well during Lent, but as soon as its helps and restraints are withdrawn, go back to their old state of carelessness and unwatchfulness ; sometimes they grow weary even before its close ; but let us remember our Saviour's warning, "The last state of that man is worse than the first." Life is made up of days and weeks, and if, through Christ's help, we are enabled to refrain from a particular sin during Lent, we may by continued watchfulness, and by His continued help, refrain altogether ; and if we are not weary in well-doing, we have His own promise, that in due season we shall reap the reward.

Thursday after Third Sunday in Lent.

Read the thirty-ninth chapter of Genesis, being the First Lesson at Morning Service on the Third Sunday in Lent.

JOSEPH is often considered as a type of Christ, and he certainly resembles Him in the purity and innocence of his life. Of almost every other character in the Old Testament good and evil are recorded, and sometimes the evil seems so to abound, that we almost marvel how such sinners could still be the children of God. Such are David, Jacob, and many others. But against Joseph such blemishes are not alleged, and in studying his history we find an example for almost every condition of life.

Lent is the season when we are especially called to consider the example which our Lord has set us, and to try to follow it; and the likeness of Joseph to Him may be a reason why his history has been selected to be read just now. It is as if we had the original and the copy placed side by side, and were taught by them how far it is possible for us to imitate the pattern which has been set us. If we had only our Saviour's perfect model, we might be inclined to despair and to say, "Who can attain unto it?" but when we see Joseph's resemblance to it, we know that he, like us, was a mortal man, and that through God's grace we may act as he did.

The first scene in which Joseph is presented to us is, like our Lord's at the beginning of Lent, one of temptation. Satan tempted him, as he did Jesus, through the lusts of the flesh, and, like Jesus, he resisted and caused him to flee from him. Our Saviour, as we found before, vanquished the devil by means of the Scriptures; Joseph had not this support, for the written Word was not yet given, but he

used the weapons he had. He recalled to mind whose servant he was, and met the assailant, by the question, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

And by these two means may we also prevail against our spiritual foe. We have before seen how the Bible can help us, but there are seasons when, though we know our duty, we seem to lack strength to perform it; then let Joseph's reflection strengthen us. During Lent we hear again and again of the wondrous love of our Saviour to fallen man; and therefore have even more cause than Joseph had to say, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against my God and my Redeemer?" How can I, by giving way to the lusts of the flesh, make of no avail all that He has done for me? How can I "crucify the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame?" We are told that the Lord had been with Joseph, and made him a prosperous man, and therefore he thought it ungrateful to sin against Him. But how much more does this apply to us, who have been made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of Heaven! How can we deliberately sin against Him who has bestowed all this upon us? How can we run the risk of losing all these benefits, by sinning against God?

Friday after Third Sunday in Lent.

Read the fortieth chapter of Genesis.

In the prison to which Joseph was sent, in consequence of the wicked misrepresentations of Potiphar's wife, were two fellow-captives, both servants of the king of Egypt. Joseph, by his good conduct, soon

gained the approbation of the governor, so that he gave him charge of all the other prisoners, "and looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper." One morning, on going his usual rounds, he was struck by the mournful appearance of these two men, and upon inquiry found they were troubled by a dream they had each had, of which they could not understand the meaning, and wished very much to obtain an interpreter.

Joseph inquired into the nature of their dreams, and then exercised the power God had given him of interpreting them. The interpretation of the butler's dream was very favourable, and Joseph assured him that he should soon be restored to his former situation in the king's household; and then asked him, as a small return for all the attention he had shown him, to remember him there, and to draw the king's attention to the injustice which had been inflicted upon him.

Such a request, one would have thought, was sure to be attended to; for every time the butler remembered his prison life, he would also remember the kind and sympathizing friend who had so much alleviated his hardships; but this, alas! was not the case; and in the few brief words with which this chapter concludes, a whole tale of ingratitude is revealed: "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgat him."

Our hearts fill with anger at the thought of the man; but before we condemn his conduct, let us examine our own towards One who is greater than Joseph, lest in thus doing we condemn ourselves likewise. When troubles or perplexities come upon us, we are all of us ready to flee to our Lord for help and assistance; and never is His help implored in vain. How many times can we all remember when He has raised us from the bed of sickness; restored

to us our friends ; rescued us from imminent danger, and put comfortable thoughts into our troubled minds ; and in the first flush of gratitude and excitement, we are ready to vow, as doubtless the butler did, that we will never forget our Deliverer and Friend ; and that we will show our thankfulness by every means in our power. But do these feelings continue ? Is the conduct of the convalescent man such as he vowed it should be upon his sick bed ? Do the mourners continue to act as they resolved they would when in the chamber of death ? Is the life of the prosperous man at all like what he fancied it would be if set free from the trouble which oppressed him ? No ; in too many instances they have, like the butler, forgotten who it was that helped them, and will, like him, be only reminded of their fault by a fresh perplexity coming upon them.

But to bring the subject still nearer home. Let us take heed that we do not follow the butler's example at the present season. During Lent, and especially during the solemn week which is now fast approaching, we are called, as it were, to dwell in prison with our Deliverer ; and our Church has done all in her power to make us feel His goodness and kindness towards us. We hear again and again the story of His amazing love, and our hearts must be very dull and cold if they are not moved by it. And well it is, that we should thus year by year have a time set apart, when we can stand at the foot of the cross, and be stirred by the recital of all that happened there. Only let us beware that the feelings of Lent do not end with Easter. Possibly the butler was moved when Joseph told him the tale of his wrongs ; but his emotion did no good, for he forgot it in the time of prosperity. And little will it avail that we have followed Jesus through the dreary wilderness, into the Garden of Gethsemane, and wept at the Mount of Calvary, if we do not think upon them when the temptations of the world come upon us, and when

we are tempted, like the butler, not "to remember" Jesus, but forget Him.

Saturday after Third Sunday in Lent.

Read Genesis, forty-second chapter, being the Second Lesson in the Old Testament, for the Third Sunday in Lent.

IN the two last chapters which we have read, we have seen Joseph in affliction, and have compared him in some particulars to our suffering Redeemer; let us this morning notice the points of resemblance and of difference between the prosperous Joseph and our risen Lord. And, first, we see that the ingratitude of the butler was no hindrance to Joseph's advancement, but rather the means whereby it was accomplished; just as the ingratitude of those Jews who requited our Lord's love and kindness by crucifying Him, was made the means of bringing about the redemption of the world. The wickedness of man cannot hinder the purposes of God, any more than the crawling worm has power to stop the wheels of the carriage which rolls over and crushes it.

Joseph having interpreted Pharaoh's dream, and informed him that it foretold a season of great plenty, and one of scarcity, was appointed by him to carry out the measures which he had himself recommended, and to lay by a portion of the superfluous food of the seven plenteous years. All happened exactly as he had predicted. In the first seven years, in which he was ruler, the earth brought forth by handfuls; and Joseph gathered so much corn together, that he was able, when the seven years of famine came, to supply the wants not only of the Egyptians, but also of the neighbouring countries. Amongst the applicants for

relief were his own brothers, now troubled by misfortune, and ready to use any means to obtain support for themselves and their starving families.

How much does this remind us of what happened immediately after the day of Pentecost, when some of those very men, who, a few short weeks before, had conspired against the life of the innocent Jesus, being pricked to the heart, openly declared themselves His disciples; being assured that through Him alone they could obtain remission of sins! But in the conduct of our Lord to them, the type of Joseph falls short of the reality, as types almost always do.

Joseph was but a man, and when his brothers came to him for assistance, he made use of a stratagem to bring them to a keener sense of their sin; he took Simeon, and bound him before their eyes; he secretly replaced their money; and threatened the liberty of Benjamin, in order to see if they really were changed since the time that, heedless of his cries, they cast him into the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites.

Our Lord "knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man."⁶ The moment the cry was uttered, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Jesus knew it was sincere, and through His Apostle promised His murderers not only His forgiveness, but the gift of the Holy Spirit, that gift which He was exalted to give, as Joseph was exalted to bestow food.

How sweet to the repentant sinner is the assurance that Jesus knows the heart! When those who have before led a careless and wicked life are anxious to amend, too often are they met, as Joseph met his brethren, with suspicion and distrust. Men want to be assured of their sincerity, and to know their motives before they trust them; and it is natural, and perhaps right, that so it should be,

⁶ John ii. 24, 25.

and that they should see, in the doubts of those about them, the punishment of their former lives. But they have this comfort,—He, who has the keys of heaven and earth, who openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth, knows their inmost soul; and though they have but a little strength, He will not shut the door against them. But although our Saviour needs not, for His own sake, to test our sincerity, yet He often, for His people's sake, keeps them, as Joseph did his brethren, in a state of probation, “to humble and to prove them, to see if they will keep His commandments or no.” When this is the case with any of us, when the Lord does not seem to heed our prayers, nor to listen to our petitions, it should have the same effect upon us that Joseph's conduct had upon his brethren. It should make us examine ourselves “why this distress is come upon us;” and if it makes us cry out as it did them, “We are verily guilty,” we may be sure our Lord will say to us in the end, “Be not grieved nor angry with yourselves,” for He has Himself declared, “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted”.

Fourth Sunday in Lent.

Read the forty-fifth chapter of Genesis, being the First Lesson to be read at the Evening Service on the Fourth Sunday in Lent.

THIS chapter is one that at once comes home to every heart. It is scarcely possible for the most careless and hardened to listen to it with indifference. Little children will ask to be told it again and again, and grey-

⁷ Matt. v. 4.

haired men will be moved to tears by the recollection of it. The language, though simple, is so forcible that we can almost fancy we see the scene, —behold Joseph comforting his brethren ; and hear him telling them not to be grieved or angry with themselves. But if we begin to examine why it is that we are so interested, we shall see it is because of the beautiful spirit of forgiveness he displays, and shall find that in this, as in all his previous history, he was unconsciously serving as a type of the coming Saviour.

After having once convinced himself, in the way we considered yesterday, that the repentance of his brothers was sincere, Joseph no longer appears to have felt the slightest anger towards them. One single harsh word, one taunting expression, would have marred the beauty of the whole, but none such is uttered. He begs them not to blame themselves ; shows them how their evil deeds have been overruled for good ; offers them a home in his country, and sends them to fetch their father, giving them provision for the way. Not one reproach does he utter ; not once does he allude to the hardships he had endured in Potiphar's house, or his sufferings in the prison. All his thoughts seem to have been how best he could assure his brothers of his forgiveness, and prove his love towards them.

Now how beautifully does all this prefigure our Saviour's conduct to guilty man ! If we are enabled, through God's grace, really to use Lent for a season of examination and of repentance, the sins we discover are enough to drive us to despair. Day by day they rise up against us, and the more we strive against them, the more completely they often seem to have us in their power ; and if we realize in any degree that for these sins our Saviour suffered, they appear so black and so heinous that we are ready to doubt whether we have any hope of obtaining God's mercy.

But let us turn to the concluding passages of our Saviour's life, and see whether, like Joseph's brethren, we cannot obtain comfort. How did He answer the thief on the cross? He promised him a share of His kingdom: "To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise⁸." How did He excuse His murderers? "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do⁹." Why did He say He was about to suffer? "That the Scriptures might be fulfilled, that thus it must be¹." How did He console His sorrowing though weak disciples? "Let not your heart be troubled: I go to prepare a place for you²."

In all these, and many, many more instances, our Lord showed Himself as loving and as forgiving to us as Joseph did to his brethren. And now He is exalted on His throne of glory, it is far more impossible for Him to change, than it was for Joseph, when he was made governor of Egypt, instead of being a younger son in his father's house. He offers us to be near unto Him, and to dwell with Him, as Joseph wanted his brothers to live in Goshen, "In My Father's house are many mansions." He tells us not to regard our stuff, for the good of all that land is ours, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven." He sends us His Holy Spirit as an earnest of the coming possession, as Joseph sent a present to his father; and though, like old Jacob, we may at times be tempted to disbelieve, if, like him, we can remember that our Saviour lives, it will give us strength to go on our way rejoicing, and to care little for the perils of the road, if at last we can behold His face.

⁸ Luke xxiii. 43.

¹ See Matt. xxvi. 54.

⁹ Luke xxiii. 34.

² John xiv. 1, 2.

Monday after Fourth Sunday in Lent.

WE have now finished that portion of the history of Joseph which is appointed to be read by our Church, and have seen how his life and conduct pre-figured or typified the life and conduct of our blessed Lord ; but before leaving him, it will be well for us to see what other practical instruction may be derived from his history : for we must remember that St. Paul says, “ All these things happened unto them for ensamples : and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come³.”

St. Paul says to us, in one of his Epistles, “ Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ⁴.” These words cannot be exactly applied to Joseph, because he came before our Lord, but the same Spirit which moulded the character of Paul formed that of Joseph. Let us then consider him as a son, as a servant, as a sufferer, and as a ruler.

As a son he seems fully to have obeyed the command, “ To honour his father, and to obey him.” We cannot fail to remember the readiness with which he went to his brothers, when Jacob bade him, although he must have been aware of their ill-feeling towards him ; and when they came to him in Egypt, his first inquiry was after his aged parent : “ Does my father yet live ? ” His first care was for his comfort. “ Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt : come down unto me, tarry not : and thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, . . . and there will I nourish thee.” How warmly he greeted him when he arrived, falling on his neck and kissing him ! how kindly he spoke of him to Pharaoh ! how tenderly

³ 1 Cor. x. 11.

⁴ 1 Cor. xi. 1.

and respectfully he nursed him when he was ill ! and how anxious he was to carry out his wishes with respect to his burial ! And what a contrast is all this to the conduct of too many in our own day, who seem to think their duty to their parents is finished when they cease to be dependent upon them ! If children now resembled Joseph, should we behold the painful spectacle of an aged parent supported by the parish, whilst the children were living in ease and comfort ? Should we hear the short hasty replies to a father or mother we so constantly do ? or see them considered a burden in the house of the child they have brought up and nourished ? or find people despising them because they had been better educated, and had got on in life better than they had ? No ; we should strive, as he did, to render their declining years comfortable, and to obtain their blessing before they die.

Again, as a servant, how bright an example of obedience and faithfulness does Joseph afford ! How many, in his circumstances, torn away from his father's house, and placed, without his own will, in a dependent situation, would have thought it quite as much as could be expected of them, if they did what they were obliged to do with tolerable care and exactness ! how few would have tried to make themselves really valuable to their master ! They would have spent their time in bemoaning the hardness of their lot, and in devising means for returning to their own country, and never have thought of identifying themselves with the family with whom they lived. But as soon as Joseph found himself in Potiphar's house, he devoted himself to the duties of his place ; every thing that he did was well and cheerfully done, and the Lord prospered him, and was with him, (as He always will be with those who faithfully serve Him, be their station what it may,) and gave him grace in the sight of his master.

Dear brethren, ye who serve, are you acting like Joseph? You have higher inducements than he could have; for when asked to do wrong he could only say, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" but you can add, "We serve the Lord Christ." He looked indeed to God's favour as well as to man's; but we look forward to the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has promised, as a reward for hearty service, an inheritance in that kingdom which He died to obtain for us.

Tuesday after Fourth Sunday in Lent.

WE are now to consider Joseph as a sufferer, and in so doing we are at once struck by his resemblance to our blessed Lord. It was Joseph's brethren who sold him into captivity; and it was one of Christ's own disciples, one of those who had eaten with Him, who betrayed Him. It was Potiphar, to whom Joseph had been such a faithful servant, and whose house had been *blessed* for his sake, who put him into prison; and it was the Jews, amongst whom our Saviour had dwelt for thirty-three years, whose sicknesses He had healed, whose diseases He had cured, whose children He had raised from the dead, who cried out, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" And, as their sufferings were the same, so was the spirit in which they bore them: not one angry word is recorded of Joseph, and we have before seen how cordially he received his brethren as soon as they gave any token of repentance; whilst of our Saviour it is declared, that "when He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not".

⁵ 1 Pet. ii. 23.

Dear brethren, are we walking in their steps? We may not, like Joseph, have any great injustice to complain of; but in the daily intercourse of life there are constant petty misunderstandings and misinterpretations, which are hard for flesh and blood to bear. Brothers and sisters are envious now, as much as they were in Joseph's day. Masters and mistresses are as apt to believe false reports of their servants now, as they were then. Taunting expressions are as much used as they were when it was said, "Behold this dreamer cometh;" and the cheek will glow, and the heart will beat, and the desire for revenge will arise; but oh, let them not be indulged! This is a temptation for which we must be especially prepared, for it is one which is sure to assail us; and when we are seeking for grace to endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, we ought especially to pray that we may be enabled patiently to endure reproach; and to remember that if we do well and suffer for it, it is acceptable to God. It is such an easy matter to revenge unkind speeches, by making unkind ones in return; to answer an unjust accusation, by bringing a just one in reply; that it requires long and severe self-discipline to enable us to conquer the desire; but if we thus take the matter into our own hands, we are avenging ourselves, and we cannot expect that God will "plead our cause;" whereas if we bear it patiently, we may hope that He will be with us and prosper us, as He did Joseph.

Joseph's long course of patient endurance as a sufferer no doubt fitted him for prosperity when it came to him. He knew how hard unkindness was to bear, and was therefore very careful not to show any to his brothers, when they came before him as suppliants; and this is the use which we should make of unkind treatment. Instead of retaliating and wishing to inflict upon others the hardships they have made him endure, a true Christian will wish to

spare them the pain he has himself felt ; and when he in his turn has the power, will do to others, not as they did, but as he would they should have done to him. This is the way our blessed Saviour has acted. We are told that, now He has returned to His heavenly home, He still remembers His earthly sufferings, not for the sake of punishing those who inflicted them, but of sympathizing with and helping those who are now enduring the same ; and it is indeed a blessed thought that our Lord, on His throne on high, is as ready to receive repentant sinners as Joseph was, when he bade his brethren "draw near" and not be grieved or angry with themselves, "for God had sent him before them to preserve their lives."

Wednesday after Fourth Sunday in Lent.

GALATIANS iv. 21—31.

"Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law ? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh ; but he of the free-woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory : for these are the two covenants ; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not ; break forth and cry, thou that travallest not : for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as

Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the Scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free-woman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free."

THE Epistle for last Sunday is taken from St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, and in order to understand it, it will be well to consider the motives which induced him to write it; for if we only take the few verses contained in the Prayer Book, it is difficult to see the drift of his argument, but by viewing it in connexion with the rest of the Epistle the meaning is plain.

Galatia was a large region of Asia Minor, inhabited by a colony of Gauls. Of course, they were idolaters, as all people at that time were, excepting the Jews; but they do not appear to have been bigoted to their own religion, and when St. Paul came to preach to them, instead of the persecutions and ill-treatment which he had encountered at Ephesus, Thessalonica, and many other places, he tells us he was received "like an angel of God;" and so eager were they to embrace the Gospel, and so thankful were they to him for having brought them these good tidings, that he says of them, "If it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes and have given them to me."

It must have been very delightful to the weary, ill-used Apostle to be thus treated, and great, no doubt, was his attachment to his Galatian converts. Great, therefore, must have been his disappointment, when tidings reached him that many of them had forsaken the pure Gospel which he had preached to them, and were following new teachers. He immediately wrote to warn them of their error, and to

assure them that what he had taught them was right, for he had received it not of men, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. The teachers to whom they had submitted were Judaizers, and, as was perhaps natural, attached great importance to the rite of circumcision. This in itself was a matter of little consequence, for St. Paul himself had caused Timothy to be circumcised, and in writing to the Corinthians had declared that "circumcision was nothing, and uncircumcision was nothing;" but he saw that the desire of the Galatians to submit to this rite arose from wrong motives; that they were not going to be circumcised merely to avoid giving offence to the Jews around them, but to be made like them, in order to avoid suffering persecution for the cross of Christ. He saw that they no longer dared trust, as he had taught them, simply to Christ for salvation; that they no longer believed that He had redeemed them from the curse of the law, being made a curse for them; and no longer enjoyed the blessedness of feeling that they were His children, and He their tender and loving Father; but that taught by these new teachers, they were struggling to fulfil the law of Moses, and in this way secure the favour of the Almighty; and that they were about to be circumcised in order to show their adherence to these new teachers; and therefore he wrote to warn them that if for this reason they were circumcised, Christ would profit them nothing, for they were debtors to do the whole law. He told them that that covenant under which the Jews had lived, and of which circumcision was a sign, had passed away; and then he taught them by means of the allegory we read last Sunday, that to wish to return to it was as foolish as if the children of Abraham by his lawful wife, Sarah, had wished to be the children of the bondwoman, Hagar, and reminded them that the offspring of Hagar was turned out to make room for the child of Sarah.

He told them that in the same way the old covenant must give place to the new; and as Ishmael was very angry with Isaac, so those who have lived under the old covenant will now persecute the children of the new, but that we must still "rejoice" that we are the children, not of the bondwoman, but of the free.

The subject of covenants must be left till to-morrow; but before we quit this allegory, let us consider how *seasonable* a warning it contains. Lent is a practical season. It is a time when we are taught specially to examine ourselves, to set ourselves about new duties, to fight against old faults, and to repent of the sins we have committed against God and man. But whilst we are doing all this we must never forget that our best services are in themselves nothing worth; and that if we imagine that our fastings, self-denials, and alms can gain Heaven, we are falling into the error of the Galatians, when they imagined they could "be justified by the law," and have need of the warning of St. Paul to them, that if in this way we could please God, "Christ would have died in vain," and that if we thus seek to justify ourselves we are fallen from grace, and He becomes of no effect unto us.

Thursday after Fourth Sunday in Lent.

Read again Gal. iv. 21—31, being the Epistle for last Sunday (the same as yesterday).

In St. Paul's explanation of the allegory which formed the Epistle for last Sunday, he tells the Galatians that Hagar and Sarah represented the two covenants,—one of bondage, the other of freedom. In order to understand him, we must consider, first, what a covenant is, and, then, what was the nature of the two here spoken of.

A covenant is an agreement made between two parties, that each will perform certain conditions, either for their mutual advantage, or for the advantage of one side and the satisfaction of the other.

Of the first kind are those which are entered into by masters and servants, or landlords and tenants, in which the master agrees to give certain wages in return for certain services ; and the landlord consents to allow the tenant the use of his house on payment of a certain rent. Of the second, are those which are often entered into between parents and children, and teachers and pupils, that a reward shall be bestowed on the completion of such and such a task. In this case, the advantage is all on the side of the child ; and yet the parent or teacher cannot bestow the reward unless the stipulated conditions are performed.

Of this last kind must be every covenant between God and man. The Lord of the universe stands in no need of our obedience ; yet from time to time He has entered into covenant with us, and has promised a reward for our obedience.

As soon as He had formed Adam from the dust of the ground, He entered into covenant with him, promising, on His part, to give him every thing which was necessary for his perfect happiness, if he would abstain from the fruit of one particular tree. Adam failed, and the covenant was broken ; for no covenant is binding unless both sides fulfil their agreement : but God did not cast off His creatures, but from time to time renewed with Adam's offspring the same covenant He had made with him ; that is, He promised them eternal life if they would keep His laws. To the chosen race, the descendants of Abraham, God gave laws from Mount Sinai. It was to the covenant made with them that St. Paul alludes in the Epistle. The sign of it was circumcision. But this covenant was also broken ; for no man ever lived who could keep the whole law, and if he failed in one point he was guilty of all.

God had foreseen this, and in His wonderful goodness provided a remedy. He gave His own well-beloved Son. Jesus kept that law which man had broken ; and God, for His reward, spared His guilty creatures, and gave them, for His sake, the promise of the Holy Spirit.

This was the Gospel which St. Paul had brought to the Galatians, and well might he marvel that they had so soon forsaken it. Well might he wonder at their folly in wishing to receive the sign of the old covenant, instead of availing themselves of the privileges of the new.

These privileges, dear brethren, belong to us as well as to the Galatians. Christ has given Himself for our sins as He did for theirs. He has redeemed us from the curse of the law, and has made us His children as He did them : let us take heed that we stand fast in our liberty. We are now entering upon that solemn season of the year, when we are especially taught how Christ performed His part of the covenant, when we are led to contemplate His sufferings for us. Let us beware that our spirit at this holy period be not one of self-righteousness or self-dependence ; for if it be, Christ will profit us nothing.

But, on the other hand, we must remember what St. Paul tells the Galatians, that they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts ; and we must bear in mind that the season of Lent is especially given for us to obtain this mastery. True, we cannot by our utmost efforts so perfectly keep the commandments, as to *merit* Heaven ; but we can show by our *endeavours* to keep them, that we are grateful to Him who has redeemed us from the curse of the law. Jesus died to obtain Heaven for us, but He will not have any there who have here sown to the flesh. He died to obtain for us the adoption of sons, but He will have no disobedient children in His household.

Friday after Fourth Sunday in Lent.

JOHN vi. 1—14 (being the Gospel for the Fourth Sunday in Lent).

“Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His miracles which He did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. When Jesus then lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company come unto Him, He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this He said to prove him: for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, saith unto Him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves; and when He had given thanks, He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. When they were filled, He said unto His disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.”

EVERY Gospel throughout Lent contains some proof

of the divinity of our Lord. In one we see Him triumphing over the snares of Satan, and causing him to depart from Him ; then, with a single word, healing the daughter of the Canaanitish woman ; next, casting out a dumb devil ; and in the one for last Sunday we are told how He fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes.

And well it is that we should at this season be instructed in the true nature of our blessed Lord ; that, before we are told the wondrous story of His love, we should be taught *who* it was who thus died for us ; and learn how great in the sight of God was our sin, which could only be atoned for by the death of His own Son, who was equal with Himself.

But whilst these miracles exhibit our Saviour as God, they also show how truly He was man ; they prove how completely He had taken our nature upon Him, and how He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities. To Him the cry of distress was never uttered in vain ; and even when no appeal was made, as in the case of the five thousand, His eye saw their distress, and He was ready to relieve them.

And is not this, too, a lesson of which we have great need during the present season ? If we are using Lent as a time of self-examination, we are often in danger of despondency ; so many sins rise up against us, that we are ready to exclaim with St. Paul, "O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from this body of death" ? But let us remember, that He who cast out devils on earth still lives and is mighty, and that He is as ready to hear the prayers of His people now as He was then. He listened to the cry of those who besought Him to heal their bodily diseases, and He will not turn a deaf ear to those who entreat Him to heal the diseases of their souls.

In the miracle which we have to consider this week, we see how our Lord blesses small means :

⁶ Rom. vii. 24.

“Lord, what are these among so many ?” said Philip when he first beheld the loaves. “What good can these do ?” And in the same spirit we are ready to exclaim, “What is the good of going to church and reading serious books, and using helps for self-examination, as we are recommended to do this Lent ? I want something more than that to do my soul good.” Ah, so said the disciples, they wanted something more ; and truly those five loaves would but have mocked their hunger, had not the Lord been by ; but with His blessing they had enough, and to spare ; and little will avail our church-goings, our examinations, our self-denials, if done in any other spirit than dependence upon Him ; but “the blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich ;” and He is as able now to make His ordinances nourishing to our souls, as He was to make the crumbs of bread nourishing to the five thousand in the wilderness. He *could* have fed them by His will alone, without using bread, but He did not choose to do it ; and doubtless He could now kindle and keep alive in our souls the fire of His love without any outward means. But will He do so ? His promises are to answer our prayers ; to bless the two or three gathered together in His Name, to reward those who take up their cross and come after Him ; and if we obstinately say, “No, I will be blessed without using these means,” we are acting as the multitude would have done, if, when the meal was set before them, they had unthankfully turned away.

*Saturday after Fourth Sunday in Lent.***JOHN vi. 12, 13.**

“When they were filled, He said unto His disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.”

THE words which we have just read were uttered by our blessed Lord at the conclusion of the miracle we yesterday considered. When the five thousand people had finished their meal, Jesus looking round beheld the ground strewn with pieces of bread and fish. Then said He to His disciples, “Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.” They gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above to them that had eaten.

How strange, at first sight, seems this direction ! Our Lord had just proved His power of maintaining a vast multitude with the very smallest supply of food ; and the disciples might naturally have said, “Why cumber ourselves with these crumbs, when Thou canst at any moment satisfy our wants ?” But He never forgot that He was our teacher as well as our Saviour, and in these few words He left a lesson applicable to His people in all ages and under all circumstances. Let us endeavour to apply to ourselves the instruction it conveys. How many at this season are regretting the smallness of their means of grace ! They feel that Lent might be indeed a time of great profit and improvement ; but they live where the doors of the church are never opened excepting on the Lord’s day, and where no opportunities are given of special prayer or instruction

in the great events which ought to occupy the Christian's mind ; or although these opportunities are many and great, they are unable to avail themselves of them. Their time is not their own ; they are servants in a family who do not themselves value these privileges, and therefore do not think of accordinng them to their domestics ; or they are mothers of little children, and often must hear the church-bell ring in vain, when their soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord. To such this miracle brings comfort and direction. The Saviour is able to satisfy your soul with the smallest supply of spiritual food, just as easily as He did these five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, and He is as little likely to disregard your wants as He was theirs. He can bless the solitary reading ; the quarter of an hour's hardly-snatched retirement, for prayer or meditation ; yea, the inward ejaculation, when you have no time for more ; and make them as efficacious to the good of your soul as the meeting in the sanctuary and the stirring sermon. Only be faithful in gathering up the fragments, in using the advantages which you have ; let nothing be lost. Spend no time in vain regrets, but endeavour, in the midst of your worldly business, to fix your mind on heavenly things ; and although others, more highly favoured, may think yours a lost Lent, you will find when Easter comes, that like these five thousand you have been filled.

But, again, if Lent is in any respect profitable to us, it will fill our hearts with gratitude to that Saviour who has done so much for us ; and we shall long to show our love to Him, and shall earnestly exclaim, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits ?" And to some the question seems almost puzzling, and they are ready despondingly to ask, "What can *I* do ? I have no time, no money, no influence." "Gather up the fragments that remain." You cannot do as much as many, but our Lord at the very moment of the display of His

power did not despise the crumbs, and He will not despise the day of small things ; only let nothing be lost. Account nothing too trifling to be noticed by Him ; nothing too mean to be devoted to His service. Your commonest occupation may be sanctified by being done as to the Lord, and not to man. And if you thus try to please Him in little things, to use the one talent committed to you, He will so bless you, that you will find in the end that, like the disciples' meat, it has wonderfully increased, and that you have far more opportunities of serving God than ever you had deemed possible.

And, once more, may not these words convey a needful warning to those who, like the multitude, are filled with good things, either temporally or spiritually, telling us how hateful in God's sight is any extravagance or waste ? He could have satisfied the wants of His disciples with a word, but He chose rather that they should gather up the crumbs. And He can provide for the wants of His poor without your aid ; but if He has given you more than you require, He will hold you responsible if you do not feed them with the fragments. He can Himself nourish the souls of those dependent on you, but if you wilfully withhold from them the means of grace, He will blame you for not having given to them a portion of what He has bestowed upon you.

Fifth Sunday in Lent.

HEBREWS ix. 11—15 (being the Epistle for the day).

“Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause He is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.”

In the Epistle for to-day St. Paul is speaking of the two covenants, and is endeavouring to show to the Jews who lived in the time of Christ how superior was their condition to that of their brethren under the first. He admits that these had indeed a shadow of good things to come, that they had ordinances, and services, and sacrifices; but still, how inferior was all this to the perfect covenant, under which they now were! And then he puts this striking question, “If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your

conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" In other words, "If God was willing to accept the offering of the blood of bulls and of goats, will He not much more pardon those for whom was shed the blood of His dear Son?"

Reader, this argument of St. Paul's applies to us as well as to the Jews; and it is one on which, at this season especially, we should love to dwell. We are trying during Lent to discover our faults, and by God's help to overcome them; and if we are in earnest in our work, every day will show us more and more of the wickedness of our own hearts, of our own weakness, and of our need of a Saviour. We shall find out how very difficult it is for us to get rid of even a little fault; how it seems to stick to us, and persecute us again and again; and when our attention is thus drawn towards it, we discover that it is one in which we have indulged for years, almost unknowingly: and yet all these transgressions have been marked by God, and if not before blotted out of His book, will appear against us at the judgment-day.

For instance, we were warned when Lent began that the sin of exaggeration or of prevarication was one against which we ought to guard. At first we scarcely believed we could be guilty of it; but when we began to watch we found ourselves constantly saying a little less, or a little more, than the strict truth; and when we remember how long we must have indulged in this habit, and how hateful it is in His sight who declareth that He will in no wise admit into His kingdom any one who loveth or maketh a lie, we are filled with horror, and almost think it impossible to obtain pardon.

Or we have perhaps made a resolution against hastiness of temper, and have determined never once during Lent to speak angrily, unkindly, or peevishly. But unforeseen provocations have arisen, and instead of being able to say we have never failed, we can

scarcely look back upon a single day in which we have entirely succeeded.

Or, our vow may have been against scandal ; and yet how often have we caught ourselves laughing at an ill-natured tale, and even repeating it for the amusement of others ! All this is very sad, and shows how impossible it would have been for us to gain Heaven under the covenant of works ; but it need not drive us to despair. By the Jewish law the blood of a sheep, or ox, sanctified to the purifying of the flesh ; but we have a better and higher sacrifice offered for us. We have not to seek it for ourselves, or to find a priest to offer it ; for it has been offered once for all, and we cannot doubt its efficacy. The Jews might well say, " It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins " ; but we cannot but believe that the blood of Christ, God's only Son, can purge our conscience from dead works.

But how may that blood be applied to ourselves ?

How did the Jews use their sacrifices ? When they had broken any of God's laws, they were required, first, to make restitution so far as was in their power : then they brought their sacrifice to the priest, laid their hand upon its head ; the priest slew it, and sprinkled them with its blood ; and whilst he was doing this, they would doubtless remember the great Sacrifice which had been promised, and would long for it to come, but would recollect that in the mean time God had promised to forgive them, upon the offering up of a sacrifice ; and they would humbly hope that their sins were pardoned, and would go away cheered and comforted.

Just so must we act when we have sinned against God. We must first earnestly repent of our sins, and show that our repentance is sincere by making

⁷ Heb. x. 4.

all the amends we can. Then we must confess our transgressions to our heavenly Father, and beg Him to forgive us for the sake of His dear Son ; and then we must try to grasp the thought that, for those very sins, Jesus Christ was offered, and think how great those sins must have been to require such a sacrifice.

That Sacrifice has been offered as surely as the goat was offered on the day of atonement ; and if the Israelites were forgiven, shall not we also be forgiven ? “ For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh : how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God ? ”

Monday after Fifth Sunday in Lent.

JOHN viii. 46—59 (being the Gospel for Fifth Sunday).

“ Jesus said, Which of you convinceth Me of sin ? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me ? He that is of God heareth God’s words : ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. Then answered the Jews, and said unto Him, Say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil ? Jesus answered, I have not a devil ; but I honour My Father, and ye do dishonour Me. And I seek not Mine own glory : there is One that seeketh and judgeth. Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death. Then said the Jews unto Him, Now we know that Thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets ; and Thou sayest, If a man keep My saying, he shall

never taste of death. Art Thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead ? and the prophets are dead: whom makest Thou Thyself ? Jesus answered, If I honour Myself, My honour is nothing: it is My Father that honoureth Me; of whom ye say, that He is your God: yet ye have not known Him; but I know Him: and if I should say, I know Him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know Him, and keep His saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto Him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham ? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then took they up stones to cast at Him: but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by."

THIS week is by some called Passion Week, because in it we begin to commemorate the last sufferings of our Lord. The incident recorded in the Gospel shows that the malice of the Jews against Jesus was in no wise abated; and that notwithstanding the argument He had before made use of, that Satan cannot be divided against himself, and notwithstanding the holiness and purity of His life, which enabled Him confidently to ask, Which of you convinceth Me of sin ? they still persisted in ascribing to Satanic agency the mighty works which they could not deny that He performed.

The occasion of their present anger was the reproof which Jesus administered in answer to their assertion, that Abraham was their father. He said He knew that they were Abraham's seed; but that if they were his children in reality, as well as in name, they would do his works; and instead of seeking to kill Jesus, would rejoice to see His day. Our Lord then took occasion in a remarkable manner to assert His divinity. This so enraged them that

“they took up stones to cast at Him ; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.”

From this Gospel we may learn three practical lessons.

First, it teaches us how great are our privileges and our responsibilities. Jesus said that Abraham rejoiced to see His day, and he saw it, and was glad. But how small was Abraham’s knowledge compared to ours, to whom Christ has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself! And we are more inexcusable than the Jews, if we do not believe in Him ; for we have much fuller light than they enjoyed. We know how greatly His Father honoured Him ; and have again and again been taught how He not only died, but rose again, showing thereby that He was not only greater than Abraham, and greater than the prophets, but that He was, as He declared on another occasion, equal with God Himself, and therefore able to give us eternal life, or, as He here expresses it, prevent our seeing death.

And this leads us to remark, in the second place, how strongly our Saviour here asserts His divinity. “Verily, verily, before Abraham was, I am ; not I was, but I am ; the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ; able to keep from death all who obey Me.” And this is a lesson upon which, at this season, we have great need to dwell ; for vain would be all the sufferings of Calvary if borne by one less than God. We might pity, we might admire, but we could not trust with our redemption any but a perfectly pure and holy Being ; One who is Himself harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.

And, thirdly, does not this Gospel show how entirely voluntary were all the sufferings of Christ ? When the Jews cast stones at Him, He went through the midst of them, and so passed by. When they sought to take Him, He escaped out of their hands.

When they would have cast Him down headlong, He went His way ; and could He not also have come down from the cross ? Yea, His Father would have sent Him twelve legions of Angels. But if He had, what would have become of this fallen world ?

Tuesday after Fifth Sunday in Lent.

Read the third chapter of Exodus, being the First Lesson at Morning Service for the Fifth Sunday in Lent.

MOSES was a type of Christ. He himself tells us so in the eighteenth chapter of Deuteronomy, and the fifteenth verse, where he says, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me ;" which words St. Peter and St. Stephen both tell us refer to our Saviour¹. And the Israelites were a type of His Church ; and probably, as in the case of Joseph, this was the reason that their history was selected to be read at this season.

In the chapter we have just read, we see at once how similar was the condition of the Israelites in Egypt to that of the world after the fall of Adam ; how both were in bondage under a hard taskmaster ; both totally unable to deliver themselves, and both seen and pitied by God : but how different the manner in which the work of deliverance was undertaken in the two cases ! "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God²!" exclaimed our Lord. "O my Lord, send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send³," said the frightened Moses. "I lay

¹ Acts iii. 22 ; vii. 37.

² Heb. x. 7.

³ Exod. iv. 13.

down My life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again²,” said Jesus. “Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh?” humbly asked Moses. In the one case, we have the authority and power of the Creator; in the other, the trembling doubts of the Creature.

Yes; as well might we attempt to portray in a picture the brightness of the sun, as to liken our Lord to any of His creatures; yet the effort may show us more of His perfection: just as the endeavour of a painter to depict the sun’s brightness, convinces him more and more of the exceeding glory of his rays.

In the prophecy which Moses uttered respecting the coming of our Lord, where he calls Him “a Prophet like unto me,” he marks his own sense of inferiority, by the solemn warning he gives to those who will not hearken to Him. The Lord said, “Whosoever will not hearken unto My words, which He,” the Prophet, “shall speak in My Name, I will require it of him³. ” Dear friends, that prophecy has been fulfilled; that Prophet has appeared. Have we hearkened to His words? Next week we are to hear again the story of His dying love; to have His last sayings repeated to us. Are they to fall, as they so often have done, on unwilling ears? If they do, we run a fearful risk of sharing the fate of Pharaoh, who turned a deaf ear to the warnings of Moses. He began by refusing to give up his own comfort and convenience, when commanded to do so: he ended in having his heart hardened, and being deserted of God. If in the course of our Lenten meditations it has ever been impressed upon our mind that some duty we have hitherto neglected, ought to be attended to, that some habit in which we have indulged ought to be given

² John x. 17, 18.

³ Deut. xviii. 19.

up, let us not turn away from the thought. It may cost us something to follow it out. It would have cost Pharaoh something to have let the children of Israel go three days' journey into the wilderness; but how fearful was the punishment of his disobedience! And if he thus suffered for disregarding the law of Moses, how much sorcer will be the punishment of those who disregard the law of Christ, written on our hearts by His Holy Spirit!

Wednesday after Fifth Sunday in Lent.

EXODUS iii. 11—14.

“And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? And He said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain. And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is His Name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.”

THERE is one verse in the First Lesson for last Sunday morning, which, taken in connexion with a portion of the Gospel, affords a striking proof of the divinity of our Lord.

After God had given His commands to Moses to go to Pharaoh, and had answered his first difficulties and objections, by assuring him that He would go with

him, Moses, still unwilling to enter upon his arduous task, inquires, "When I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is His Name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." The word I AM is the same as Jehovah, and was considered by the Jews the most awful of all God's titles, so much so, that they never named it without a pause; and yet it was the title claimed by Jesus in the conversation which is recorded in last Sunday's Gospel. When the Jews exclaimed, "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham?" His answer was, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM," which made them so angry that they took up stones to cast at Him.

And very precious is this title, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever!" Moses shrank from encountering Pharaoh; and well might we shrink from the encounter which every Christian must have with the world, the flesh, and the devil, did we not know that Jehovah has never changed: and that that great Being, who appeared to Moses in the bush, and on whom he was afraid to look, is the same who was crucified for us at Calvary, and will assuredly be with us in our difficulties as much as He was with Moses in his.

Well may the Church bring forward as she does this week proofs of our Lord's divinity; for had Jesus been any other than the "I AM," of what avail would His death have been? "Who am I that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" said Moses, when commanded by God to undertake their deliverance; and "What am I?" would have been the exclamation of the highest Archangel,

* Heb. xiii. 8.

if commanded to attempt to rescue the children of men from the bondage of sin and Satan. No, none but Jehovah Himself could have ransomed us; and when we read of His dealings with His own people, we see how completely He has been the same in all generations. He who listened to the cry of the Israelites was the same God who healed the Canaanitish woman; He who heard their groaning, hearkened to the prayer of Jairus; and He who is now in the heavens, is still the same "I AM," the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, which is, and which was, and which is to come. If then He knew the sorrows of His people in Egypt, can He be ignorant of the troubles of His people now? If He listened to their cry, will He turn a deaf ear to our prayers? If He remembered the covenant which He had established with them, will He forget the covenant He has sealed with His own blood, and ratified as at this time on Calvary?

Thursday after Fifth Sunday in Lent.

EXODUS iii. 18, 19; v. 1, 2. 4, 5. 8.

"And God said unto Moses, Thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand.

"Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness. And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey

His voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go. . . . And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? get you unto your burdens. And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now are many, and ye make them rest from their burdens. . . For they be idle; therefore they cry, saying, Let us go and sacrifice to our God."

THE history of Pharaoh is one of the most awful in the Bible. It is, indeed, dreadful to hear it said of any human being: "For this cause have I raised thee up, that I might show My power in thee:" and makes us ready to exclaim, "Why doth God yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will?" But before we begin to murmur at the dealings of the Almighty, let us review Pharaoh's conduct, and see how far he is himself to blame, and whether God could not say to him, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;" and whilst we read, let us tremble, lest in imitating Pharaoh's conduct we should share Pharaoh's doom.

The first mention which is made of him is in the chapter we read yesterday, where the Lord is giving His commission to Moses; and the terms in which He is spoken of are remarkable: "I am sure the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand." You see God does not here say one word about hardening his heart; He simply declares His knowledge of it, a knowledge which was amply proved by his subsequent conduct; and, oh, how awful is it to reflect, that He to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets

* See Rom. ix. 17. 19.

* Prov. i. 24—26.

are hid, may, at this very moment, be declaring of some of us, "I am sure that they will not hearken to the message of love which is again next week to be proclaimed to them!" Let us pray that such may not be our case; it will not be unless, like Pharaoh, we harden our hearts.

The first interview of Moses with Pharaoh showed how well the Lord was acquainted with him; for his answer to the request, "Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness," was an emphatic refusal: "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." And yet that refusal is accompanied by some plausible reasoning: "The people of the land are many, and you make them rest from their burdens." You are putting a stop to all business, hindering the progress of these mighty buildings in which they are engaged, and putting me to great inconvenience; and all for what? to encourage them in their indolence, "for they be idle, therefore they cry, saying, Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord our God." "Wherfore do ye let the people from their works?"

How constantly are scenes like these taking place at the present day! "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy; the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt do no manner of work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man servant, nor thy maid servant," is one of the commands which Sunday by Sunday sounds in our ears; and from time to time some faithful servant of God enforces from the pulpit what he has just read from the Communion Table. He explains that although the day is changed, the institution has never been done away, and that although our Saviour took away its burdensome strictness, He gave no license for any but works of mercy and necessity; and he beseeches his hearers so to order their affairs as to make the Lord's day a day of rest for themselves,

and all dependent upon them. As he speaks, conviction comes to many a heart, and they half resolve to alter their arrangements, so as to afford their servants as well as themselves an opportunity of attending the services of God's house, and of devoting some portion of His holy day to private prayer and meditation. But the voice of the preacher ceases, they leave the quiet church, the world resumes its hold, and numberless objections to the plans they had thought of present themselves to their minds; great inconveniences are foreseen, and, after all, a day of rest is often only an excuse for a day of idleness; and a desire for pleasure is often the real motive which induces people to say, "Let us go and sacrifice to our God;" or, as we should say, "Let us go to His house;" and so they dismiss the subject from their minds, as Pharaoh did Moses and Aaron from his presence.

Or, at this season especially, the same process may have been gone through with regard to week-day services. Some faithful servant of God has endeavoured, by word or by writing, to convince us of the duty and advantage of making Lent a quiet season, of attending more frequently the services of His house, of devoting more time to religious exercises, and of giving those dependent upon us an opportunity of doing the same. His arguments have brought conviction; but when we attempted to follow them out, so many obstacles have arisen that we have been tempted to abandon all efforts in despair, and have felt almost angry that the subject should have been forced on our attention. But let us remember it was in this way Pharaoh first hardened his heart. If we feel a thing is right, let us not hesitate to do it, whatever the inconvenience; for if we do not, we are resisting God's Holy Spirit, we are refusing to take up our cross, and our Saviour tells us we cannot be His disciples. Doubtless it would have been inconvenient for Pharaoh to have spared his people

for three days; but how heartily must he have wished he had submitted to this comparatively trifling privation, when he saw them depart for ever, leaving his first-born dead before his eyes! And how heartily will many of us wish, when eternity opens to our view, that we had never trifled with our conscience, even though obedience to its dictates had made us endure hardships and encounter the world's scorn!

Friday after Fifth Sunday in Lent.

IN continuing the history of Pharaoh, which will be read to us the two next Sundays, two things especially strike us. His frequent professions of amendment, and the grudging spirit in which he made his concessions. Let us consider what practical lessons may be derived from each.

After his refusal to listen to the exhortations of Moses and Aaron, which we yesterday considered, the day of God's mercy was at an end, and the day of His wrath was come; for then immediately began that series of fearful visitations, which we call the ten plagues of Egypt, which went on increasing in number and severity until that final one, which filled all Egypt with mourning, and which made Pharaoh, at last, so eager for the Israelites to depart, that he got up in the middle of the night to send them away.

We have not time to consider them all in detail, but as we hear them read, one by one, we cannot but be struck with the utter helplessness and insignificance of man when contending against God. Pharaoh was a great king, he had armies under his control, he ruled a mighty nation, he governed a wise and an understanding people; but all their

greatness and all their wisdom were of no avail when the Almighty sent His thunders ; or even when He ordered the insignificant frog and the tiny fly to cover the land. He is never at a loss for instruments of chastisement. He has but to speak the word, and the very food we eat, and the water we drink, become plagues to us.

When the frogs covered the land, "Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, Intreat the Lord, that He may take away the frogs from me, and from my people ; and I will let the people go, that they may do sacrifice unto the Lord." We wait anxiously for the answer. Was this repentance too late ? Was the day of grace gone by ? Oh, no ! our God is a long-suffering God ; and Moses's reply was ready, "Be it according to thy word ;" and Moses cried unto the Lord, "and the Lord did according to the word of Moses ; and the frogs died." And what then ? "When Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them ; as the Lord had said." Strange obstinacy and perversity ; but what shall we say, when we find the same thing three times repeated ? After the plague of flies and of hail, Pharaoh again called Moses and Aaron, and with many protestations declared that it was enough ; and that if the Almighty would but stay His hand, the Israelites might go. Each time his prayer was heard ; and each time, as soon as the plague was removed, he retracted his promise. Pharaoh hardened his heart (it is written) at this time also, neither would he let the people go. Surely, after reading this, we must all admit that even towards Pharaoh the Lord showed Himself merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and of great kindness.

But are there no Pharaohs now ? Are there none who, when the hand of the Lord was heavy upon them, when sickness visited themselves or their households, when friends were taken from them,

and their sky was altogether dark and heavy, exclaimed with Pharaoh, "I have sinned, the Lord is righteous, and I am wicked. Intreat the Lord, for it is enough ;" and who yet, now that the visitation has been removed, now that they are raised from the bed of sickness, and the voice of joy and health is again heard in their dwellings, are, like Pharaoh, hardening their hearts, and refusing to obey what in the time of trouble they felt was the voice of the Lord ?

Or, to come still nearer home, are there none among us who, during the season of Lent (now so nearly over), have made resolutions of amendment, have been convinced that some sacrifice ought to be made, some sin forsaken ; and who yet, now that the time for carrying out their resolution draws near, are hesitating and wavering ? If any such there be, let them beware. The Lord's eye is upon us, as it was upon Pharaoh of old ; and oh, how awful will it be if He says of us as He did of him, "I know ye will not yet fear the Lord !" In that case, either more and more punishments must be heaped upon us, or, and that is even worse, the Lord will leave us alone, and harden our hearts as He did Pharaoh's.

Saturday after Fifth Sunday in Lent.

WE yesterday saw the insincerity of Pharaoh's repentance, and how constantly, as soon as the plague was removed, he broke his promise. To-day we may see how this happened, by remarking the grudging spirit in which he made his concessions when driven to them by fear.

After the plague of hail (of which we read yester-
e 5

day) had passed away, Pharaoh again hardened his heart, and refused to let the children of Israel go: then the Lord told Moses and Aaron to warn him, that if he still persisted in his rebellion, He would send a swarm of locusts upon the land, which would eat all that the hail had left. Pharaoh appears to have paid little attention to this threat; but his servants, wearied out with the woes which they had undergone, besought him to yield. "Let the men go," said they, "that they may serve the Lord their God: knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?" Thus exhorted Pharaoh recalled Moses and Aaron, and repeated the permission he had already three times given them: "Go, serve the Lord your God." But then, as if a sudden doubt had seized him, he added, "But who are they that shall go?" Moses's answer was plain and straightforward, "We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go; for we must hold a feast unto the Lord." "Not so!" exclaimed the king; "Go now ye that are men, and serve the Lord; for that ye did desire." So they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence; and the swarm of locusts came. But the plague was worse than Pharaoh had supposed, and once more he owned himself conquered. He called for Moses and Aaron in haste, and said, "I have sinned: forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat the Lord your God, that He may take away from me this death only." Again his prayer was heard, and again he broke his word, and then his day of grace was all but over. He made indeed one more feeble effort; for when darkness overspread the land, he again offered a conditional obedience, promising that the men, women, and children should go, if only the flocks and the herds might stay; but this, like his former proposition, was sternly rejected. "Our cattle also shall go with us, there shall not a hoof be left behind;" and upon

his refusal to submit to this, Moses declared he should see his face no more ; and the last great plague, the death of the first-born, was sent.

We often wonder at the inefficacy of a sick-bed repentance, and at the manner in which people break the vows they make in seasons of sorrow and of strong excitement ; but may we not learn from the account of Pharaoh's conduct one reason, at least, for theirs ? It is, that there has been a reservation in their repentance. They have been willing to give up something for God, but not every thing. The men and the women may go, but not the children. They will give up this sin, and forego that gratification ; but the darling passion must still be retained. It is too great an effort to put it away. Or, their fear is so strong, that even this has to be given up ; but the flocks must stay, they must consider their worldly interests ; and this custom or that practice is so profitable, they cannot relinquish it, though they know that it is wrong ; and so they try to make a bargain with their conscience, and serve God in some things, and the devil in others. But this kind of compact never answers ; if we once make up our minds to commit what we know to be sin, we are hardening our hearts, and the Holy Spirit will depart from us as Moses did from Pharaoh. And of this we may be sure, God never accepts a half obedience. To all Pharaoh's unconditional promises He lent a gracious ear, though He knew they would be broken ; but He gave no heed to him when he attempted a compromise. "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon," has been His declaration from the beginning of the world ; and vain are all our efforts to alter it,—they will but end in our being forsaken by both.

Sunday before Easter.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 5—11. (Being the Epistle for Palm Sunday.)

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name which is above every name: that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

WE are now entering the most solemn week in all the year. For what is the subject which is about to engage our attention? Is it not what Angels desire to look into? Is it not the contemplation of that event which filled Heaven and earth with wonder, and the remembrance of which will form the employment of another world? And yet poor, sinful creatures such as we, are permitted, year after year, to meditate upon it. Year after year, as the Holy Week comes round, we are told the astonishing history of our Redeemer’s sufferings. And with many of us what is the result? We listen to them as to an oft-told tale, and go away to our business or our pleasures, and live, and act, and think, as if Christ had never died, and there was no Heaven, no hell, no eternity, and nothing but this perishing world to think of or care for.

True, we call ourselves Christians, and say, and say heartily, “We believe in Jesus Christ, God’s

only Son, our Lord ; who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried ;" and we know and believe that without Him we must have perished. But there the matter ends. We do not carry the influence of our belief into the little events of every-day life. We do not leave a thing undone, simply because we know it will be displeasing to our Saviour, nor make an exertion because it is what He would approve ; and we do not gain support under trial by thinking of Him, nor get over little troubles by remembering how much worse He had to endure. In short, our faith wants reality.

If we had really stood by the cross of Christ, and seen His sufferings ; if we had heard His feeble cry, "I thirst" ; if we had marked the drops of blood oozing from His brow, and listened to His agonized call for help, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me" ?" and if we had known, as we know now, "all this was borne for us,"—for us this agony was endured,—for us this blood was shed, could we have gone away unmoved ? Would not the recollection of that scene have been ever present with us ; and the remembrance of those mournful looks, of those sorrowful words, have arrested us when we were about to do wrong ?

We cannot in body stand by the cross of Christ, for His wondrous purpose was long since accomplished, and He has returned to His heavenly home ; but we may do something like it in spirit ; and it is to enable us to do it that our Church has appointed this annual commemoration of His sufferings. She knows how faint and how weak our faith is, and therefore not content with telling us of the Lamb of God in all her services, through Advent, Christmas, and Trinity, she sets apart one portion of the year for a special remembrance of Him.

Let us strive to use it as she intends. If we have followed her teaching, we have now been for some

⁷ John xix. 28.

⁸ Matt. xxvii. 46.

weeks occupied in thinking of our faults ; in making good resolutions, and proving our weakness and inability to keep them. And now that the Holy Week is come, all this should lead us to Christ. Let us try to remember that our sins, those very sins we have so lately deplored, caused Him to suffer ; that for us He died, and that He rose for our justification, and now lives to give us the pardon we so much require.

If we have an opportunity this week of attending the daily services of our Church, of course we ought thankfully to avail ourselves of it ; but if we are unable to do so, still her admirable arrangements need not be in vain. We can read the Collects, Epistles, Lessons, and especially the Gospels, over to ourselves ; and try day by day to realize the scenes which they portray. Let us follow our blessed Redeemer through this dreadful week ; see Him in the Upper Chamber, in the Garden, and in the Judgment Hall, and try to picture the places and people which surround Him. And whilst we mark His meekness, His humility, and His love, His consideration for others and forgetfulness of self, let us pray in the words of the Collect for to-day, that "we may be enabled to follow the example of His patience," and do as the Epistle teaches, have the same mind in us which was also in Christ Jesus.

Monday before Easter.

Read again Philippians ii. 5--11, the same as yesterday.

WHILST considering our Saviour as man, as we this week do, and following Him step by step through all His sufferings, we must never forget that He is God too, and that in all our meditations a spirit of grate-

ful love must be mingled with one of reverential awe. And this seems to be the lesson our Church would teach, in choosing for our Epistle for the beginning of Holy Week a portion of Scripture which speaks of His two natures. As she began Advent, or the season of preparation for Christmas, by bidding us remember that that same Jesus, whose coming as a little infant in great humility we were about to commemorate, would come again in glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead; so does she begin Holy Week, the season when He died, with telling that He who as at this time humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, was in the beginning equal with God; and that though He chose to take upon Himself the form of a servant, and be made in the likeness of men, He was still that glorious being, to whom all knees must bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth.

And well for us that so it is; for if our efforts after holiness during Lent have been sincere, they must have made us feel how impossible it would have been for any but a Divine Being to have redeemed the world. Perhaps we began with sanguine expectations of success. We prayed earnestly for God's help, and we felt sure we should, through His grace, be enabled so successfully to fight against our besetting sin, whatsoever it may be, that at Easter we should be able to say we had never once given way to it.

Easter is nearly come, and have our anticipations been realized? Alas! No.

We have indeed improved; for no one ever in a right and humble spirit sought to please and to obey God, without in some measure succeeding; and probably our improvement has been much more evident to others than to ourselves; because when we are carefully watching our own conduct, we discover so many imperfections, that we are apt to think we

have never been so bad before. This is not really the case ; but we are, as it were, looking at ourselves through a magnifying glass, and much evil that would have passed unheeded at another time, is noted now.

But has our obedience been so perfect as to merit a reward ? Has our behaviour through this Lent been so good, that if God had said on Ash-Wednesday that He would forgive us all the sins of our past lives, if only through these six weeks we would keep His commandments, we could at the beginning of Holy Week claim the reward ?

We know it has not. We know that time after time during Lent we have done those very things which we most solemnly resolved at the beginning we would leave undone, and left undone the very things we then most firmly purposed to perform. And if we cannot during one little month so keep God's commandments, as even to satisfy ourselves, can we, dare we, risk our hopes of salvation on the obedience of a life ? Can we, dare we, think of standing at the judgment-seat of God, with no better thing than our own righteousness to plead before Him ?

And to carry our thoughts one step further. If we are not able for one month to do what we know is right, can we for a moment imagine the possibility of any human being so perfectly keeping God's law throughout a whole life, as not only to secure his own salvation, but to gain as a reward the salvation of the whole world ?

Oh, no ! if our Saviour were not indeed equal with God we could have no confidence, no comfort ; but now we may sing with the people of old, on Palm Sunday, " Hosannah." For He who this week became for us obedient unto death, is that same Being who formed the heavens and the earth, and He will at the last Day make those who once spat at and derided Him confess that He is Lord.

If we thus bear in mind the divinity of Christ, as

day by day we read or hear the accounts of His sorrows and of His sufferings, our hearts will be filled with amazement at His condescension and love in thus humbling Himself; and we shall ask ourselves, How can I show my gratitude to Him for all He has done for me? and we shall go forth from the scenes and lessons of Holy Week with a more earnest desire than we have ever before had to serve and obey Him, and at the same time with less dread of that awful moment when we must stand before Him, to give an account of what we have done in the body; for we shall remember, my Judge is my Saviour; and if He so loved me as to become for my sake obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, surely I may trust to Him, that now that He is highly exalted, He will not forsake me. God of His mercy grant that we may thus be found at that great and terrible day! Amen and Amen.

Tuesday before Easter.

Read ISAIAH lxiii. 1—7. (Being part of the Epistle for the Monday before Easter.)

“Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art Thou red in Thine apparel, and Thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat? I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people there was none with Me: for I will tread them in Mine anger, and trample them in My fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon My garments, and I will stain all My raiment. For the day of vengeance is in Mine heart, and the year of My redeemed is come. And I looked, and there

was none to help ; and I wondered that there was none to uphold : therefore Mine own arm brought salvation unto Me ; and My fury, it upheld Me. And I will tread down the people in Mine anger, and make them drunk in My fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth. I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He hath bestowed on them according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His loving-kindnesses."

In the verses we have just read, which are appointed to be used for the Epistle on the Monday before Easter, the Prophet Isaiah seems to be describing a vision or dream with which he has been favoured, in which he sees, coming towards him, a most wonderful person. He is very strong, and is clad in glorious apparel, but His garments are dyed with the juice of the grape ; and it is evident that He has been employed in treading the wine-fat, an occupation in general confined to servants and slaves.

Surprised at His appearance, the prophet inquires the meaning of so strange a circumstance ; and is told in reply, that this great Being has indeed submitted to this inglorious toil, and has accomplished unaided and alone the arduous task of pressing out the juice of the grapes ; but that He did not undertake it, until He had looked round to see if there was any other person who could or would perform it ; and when He found that no one came forward, His anger was so great that His own arm brought salvation for His people.

On examining these verses we at once see the reason why they are selected as an Epistle for this week ; for how very beautifully they apply to our Saviour ! He, like the Conqueror spoken of in the text, was glorious in His apparel, and mighty in His

strength ; for He dwelt in the light which no man can approach unto ; and was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine-stone ; and He had but to speak the word, and a world was created ; and yet for our sakes He took upon Himself the form of a servant, and did not disdain to keep the most irksome command He had given to His creatures. For our sakes he endured cold and heat, hunger and fatigue, just like one of us.

And yet, like the man in Isaiah's vision, all this was done voluntarily. No one imposed it on Him, but out of His great love for His people, and anger against their enemy, the devil, He undertook their salvation ; and, like him too, He did not come to perform our work for us, until we had found by repeated trials that we were unable to do it for ourselves. Although the covenant between Him and the Father was made before the world, yet He did not come to perform His part, until the covenant between God and man had been broken times without number ; and until it was seen by men and Angels that no human being was capable of perfectly keeping God's holy law.

This vision, then, of Isaiah's seems to show us in a kind of allegory all that our Church has been teaching us during the last few weeks ; and it will be well for us to bear it in mind, when hearing, as we do this week, of the sufferings of our Lord. It again reminds us of what we yesterday learnt, that He, who was rich, for our sakes became poor ; and the more we meditate upon this, the more we reflect upon what our Saviour was before He took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, the more shall we feel His condescension in giving up so much for us, and the more will our hearts be inclined to do what Isaiah here teaches ; "Mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed upon us, according to

His mercies, and according to the multitude of His loving-kindnesses."

Wednesday before Easter.

HEBREWS ix. 19—28.

"When Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; for then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

LUKE xxii. 54. 63—65.

"Then took they Him, and led Him, and brought Him into the high priest's house. . . . And the men

that held Jesus mocked Him, and smote Him. And when they had blindfolded Him, they struck Him on the face, and asked Him, saying, Prophesy, who is it that smote Thee? And many other things blasphemously spake they against Him."

THE Epistle for to-day is taken from the same chapter as the one for the Fifth Sunday in Lent; and the comparison which was then made between the death of Christ for our sins, and the offering up of an innocent animal in sacrifice for the sins of the people of Israel, is carried out and commented upon.

We are now shown how uniformly the Almighty has taught in His dealings with man, that it is impossible for him, by any efforts of his own, to appease God's anger; and that something more is required than repentance to obtain pardon. We are reminded that even under the first covenant, that of the law, remission of sins could not be obtained without shedding of blood; and that the patterns of things in the heavens had to be purified with it. And then it goes on to tell us, that for us a far nobler sacrifice has been offered up than was ever brought by Jews of old; a sacrifice of which theirs were but types and emblems. A sacrifice which did not, like theirs, need renewing year by year, but by which our sins were once for all put away. A sacrifice to which we are all invited to look; and in which the poorest and meanest may have a share. A sacrifice by virtue of which we are admitted not only into the holy places made with hands, but into Heaven itself.

Do we inquire what this wonderful sacrifice was? and how it was offered up? Let us turn again to this Epistle, and read it in connexion with the Gospel that follows it.

The Epistle tells us, that the sacrifice which was offered up for us was none other than Christ, who "once in the end of the world appeared to put away

sin by the sacrifice of Himself," and was offered to bear the sins of many ; and the Gospel shows us how this was done.

We there see Him, of whom last Sunday we read, that He was equal with God, standing like a common prisoner before an earthly judge. We behold Him mocked, struck, and blindfolded ; and when amidst all these indignities we hear from Him no word of reproach, we cannot but see that this was He of whom Isaiah prophesied, that He should be brought "as a lamb to the slaughter," and that this was the true Lamb of God who had "appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

But wonderful as all this was, it was not enough. If our Lord, after standing before Pilate, had (as He easily could have done) freed Himself from His cruel enemies ; if, as soon as He had uttered the emphatic words, "Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God," He had ascended into Heaven, His sacrifice would have been incomplete.

We might indeed have thought it a wondrous thing, that the Maker of heaven and earth should come down and dwell for thirty years with His people ; that He should teach them so patiently and lovingly ; and that He should submit so meekly to all their insults and ill-treatment. And so indeed it would have been very, very wonderful,—a thing at which Angels would have marvelled.

But if it had ended there, no atonement would have been made ; for no blood would have been shed, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

But this was not all.

We began this week with hearing that our blessed Lord not only took upon Him the form of a servant, but was made obedient unto death, even the death of the cross ; and day by day has this precious truth been declared to us ; day by day, as Holy Week has gone on, we have been invited to behold the

death of this wondrous Victim. We have listened to His last words, have heard His agonies described, and woe betide us if we go away careless and unimpressed.

The Israelites were compelled to be present at the offering of the yearly sacrifice ; every male, however distant, was then to go up to Jerusalem, to appear before the Lord, and to be himself sprinkled with the blood of the slain goat. It availed nothing to those who were absent.

So likewise Christ was offered to bear the sins of many, yea, of the whole world ; but He will only benefit those who apply Him to themselves. It is of no use reading and hearing of His sufferings ; no use standing, as it were, year by year, by His Cross, unless we constantly remember that all this was borne for us ; that for us these sufferings were endured, for us this blood was shed ; and unless the sight quickens us to newness of life, and enables us to do as the Collect for this week teaches, "follow the example of His patience and great humility."

Thursday before Easter.

ISAIAH 1. 5—11.

" The Lord God hath opened Mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave My back to the smiters, and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair : I hid not My face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help Me ; therefore shall I not be confounded : therefore have I set My face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth Me ; who will contend with Me ? let us stand together : who is Mine adversary ? let him come near to Me.

Behold, the Lord God will help Me ; who is he that shall condemn Me ? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment ; the moth shall eat them up. Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light ? Let him trust in the Name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks : walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of Mine hand ; ye shall lie down in sorrow."

ON hearing these verses, which are appointed to be read as one of the Epistles for this week, we must all be struck with astonishment at finding how minutely the sufferings of our Lord were described seven hundred years before He was born ; and we cannot help feeling surprised that the Jews, who had all their lives been familiar with the writings of the Prophet Isaiah, and had been accustomed to consider them as descriptive of the coming Messiah, should have failed to see that they were all fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

When they saw Him standing, meek and silent, before His judge ; when they beheld Him patiently submitting to all the insults which were heaped upon Him, allowing Himself to be spit upon, to be buffeted, and, in short, to undergo all the agonies and shame described in these verses ; and yet heard Him in the midst of this apparent helplessness, calmly assert His power, and declare that He had but to speak the word, and a whole legion of Angels would come to His aid ; and warn them that He was indeed the Son of God, and that hereafter they should see Him seated on His throne of glory, judging both the quick and the dead ; one would think conviction would have come home to the most stubborn heart, and that they would one and all have exclaimed, This is He, "of whom Moses in the law, and the

Prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph⁹.

But we know how far this was from being the case. Instead of the cry we might have expected, "Thou art the Son of God," is raised the savage yell, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Instead of the acknowledgment of Majesty, "Thou art the King of Israel," is heard the declaration, "We have no king but Cæsar;" and instead of the knee being bowed in prayer, it is bent in mockery. They lead Him out to crucify Him, and the curse descends upon them; and the word, "therefore He was turned to be their enemy," is fulfilled¹.

St. Paul tells us that all things which happened to the Israelites, "happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition²;" and we ought therefore to consider the reason of that rejection of our Saviour, of which we this week read; and to tremble whilst we do so, lest we should be in any way partakers of their guilt; for if God spared not the natural branches, we may be sure He will not spare us if we sin against Him.

The great reason of the Jews' obstinate rejection of the Messiah, is alluded to in the verses we have just read, where Isaiah warns his hearers against kindling for themselves a fire, and walking in its light.

The reference appears to be to a poor benighted traveller, lost in the middle of a dark wood, who after trying for some time to find his way, suddenly bethinks himself of the expedient of lighting a fire; and when it has blazed up, endeavours to discover the right path by the glare it casts around.

We can all see how such an experiment would end.

For a short time every thing would be as visible as in the day time, and he would choose with confidence what appeared to him the most likely path. But

⁹ John i. 45.

¹ Isa. lxiii. 10.

² 1 Cor. x. 11.

suppose, which is very probable, he makes a wrong choice? As soon as he leaves the immediate neighbourhood of the fire, the darkness seems ten times worse than it did before. He stumbles over every thing that lies in his way, feels unable either to proceed or to return; and comes at last to the conclusion, that it would have been much wiser to have waited for the dawning of the day, far off as it still appears, than, by a rash attempt to extricate himself, to have involved himself in still greater difficulties.

This parable is an apt illustration of the condition and conduct of the Israelites at the coming of our Lord. When God chose Abraham to be the father of a mighty nation, He promised that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed; and this promise Abraham seems to have understood to refer to the promised Messiah, and probably he expected and hoped that his own son, born under such peculiar circumstances, would be the Christ.

But years came on, and the Saviour came not. The children of Abraham became, as was foretold, a great nation; but He did not appear. They were for their sins carried away captive; but still He did not come. They were, through God's mercy, restored to their own land; but He was not there. And at the time of our Lord's birth, they were again in a state of depression, a conquered people with no king, and obliged to pay tribute to a foreign power. They were like the traveller in the wood, and could not see their way out of the troubles which surrounded them.

They had indeed some light, for they had the word of prophecy, which St. Peter calls the "light that shineth in a dark place³;" and upon this they ought to have rested, like the wise traveller, who remains quietly in a safe place, till the morning makes all clear.

³ 2 Pet. i. 19.

They should have said, “God has promised to send a Saviour, and in His own way, and at His own time, He will perform His promise ; but we will not try to know more than He has chosen to reveal.” If in this teachable spirit they had been waiting for the coming of their Lord, they could hardly have failed to recognize the promised Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth ; for they would have listened to His words, and noted His doings without prejudice, and must have seen how remarkably every prediction of the prophets was in Him fulfilled.

But instead of thus “staying upon their God,” they had chosen to kindle a fire, and to compass themselves with sparks ; or, in plain language, they had chosen to exercise their own reason, and to make a path of their own.

They argued in this way :

We are God’s own people, and He has promised never to cast us off ; yet we are now under the dominion of our enemies, and are obliged to pay tribute to a foreign king. Well ; our trouble will not last long ; the time is fast approaching for Messiah to appear, and He will free us from this galling yoke, and restore us to our former splendour. And when they found that no such authority was claimed by Jesus of Nazareth, but that He resolutely declined all earthly honours, bitter was their disappointment. They cast Him from them in disdain, refused to listen to His words, and obstinately declared they would have no king but Cæsar. Their eyes had been so dazzled by the light that they had made, or, in other words, by the splendour with which they had surrounded their fancied Messiah, that when Messiah really appeared, they could not recognize Him ; and although they beheld the miracles that He did, although they saw the blind made to see, the lame to walk, and the deaf to hear, they yet refused to believe that “Christ could ever come out of Galilee ;” and so, as Isaiah prophesied, they lay down in

sorrow: they have become an outcast people, and wanderers upon the face of the earth.

Now do we never, like the Jews, kindle a fire, and compass ourselves with the sparks? The way in which they made a light for themselves, was by taking part of God's Word, and leaving all the rest, just as a fire would only illuminate one path. They studied all those prophecies which spoke of Messiah's greatness, but left out such as we are now considering, which predicted His sufferings and humiliation.

And how like is this to the way in which many seek salvation!

Ask one man, how he hopes to gain Heaven? He will tell you God is too merciful to send him to hell, totally forgetting that the Bible declares not only that God is merciful, but that He is just, and will by no means clear the guilty⁴. Inquire of another, how he expects to be saved? and he will tell you he has led a most virtuous and moral life, and it will be hard if he is not rewarded. But he does not remember that "all our doings without love are nothing worth⁵"; and that "without faith it is impossible to please God⁶." Put the same question to another who is leading any thing but a virtuous life, and he will tell you, "he has believed on the Lord Jesus Christ," so is sure to be saved. But he has put out of sight the declaration, "without holiness no man shall see the Lord⁷." His fire only shows one side of the path to Heaven, and leaves the other in obscurity.

Let this then be one of our Easter resolutions. To seek more and more earnestly the light of God's Holy Spirit, which is the only light which can lead us safely through the wilderness of this world, and to determine through His grace never to kindle a fire for ourselves, but to follow patiently where He leads.

⁴ Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

⁶ Heb. xi. 6.

⁵ See 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

⁷ Heb. xii. 14.

Good Friday.

HEBREWS x. 5—7. 10—25.

“ Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me,) to do Thy will, O God. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every Priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that He had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for He is faithful that promised;) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the

assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

WE have now arrived at the most solemn day in all the year. A day on which happened the most wonderful event the world ever saw. A day on which Angels were filled with wonder, and devils with terror. A day which had been foretold for four thousand years. A day without which we should have been eternally miserable, and which we may well call *good*, for it has brought the best of good things to the whole race of man.

With what solemn feelings should we enter upon it, and how earnestly should we pray, that we may not, through any fault of our own, lose our share in its blessings!

The season of Lent for this year is drawing to its close; and what has been its effect upon us? One of the verses which we have just read (which form part of the Epistle for to-day) tells us what it ought to have done for us. It ought to have provoked us to love and to good works. "To love," because we have been told again and again the wondrous love which has been shown to us; because the sufferings of Christ, for our sakes, have, during the last six weeks, been brought before us in every variety of way we can imagine. "To good works," because by them only can we show our gratitude to Him for all that He has done for us; and because we know that one purpose of His coming was "to put His laws into our hearts."

But are these indeed our feelings? I fear that this Good Friday will find many of us destitute of them; and that, notwithstanding the advantages we have enjoyed during Lent, our love and gratitude are still lamentably cold. Perhaps one reason is, we do not consider sufficiently in detail the sufferings of our Lord. It is very easy, in the words of

this Epistle, to talk of "the one offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all." The words are soon said, but it is hard to realize their meaning. Let us, however, attempt it. Let us employ some portion of this solemn day in dwelling upon them, and endeavouring to bring before our mind's eye a picture of all that Jesus endured for our sakes. Let us think upon Him in the garden, behold the bloody sweat stand upon His brow; follow Him to Pilate; see Him crowned with thorns, mocked, scourged, and spit upon; and, finally, let us try to imagine the agonies of crucifixion: and as we dwell upon it, let us ask ourselves the solemn question, "Why was it necessary that all this suffering should be borne?" We shall find an answer in the verses we have just read; and surely the consideration of them will warm our love, and increase our gratitude.

For they tell us, first, that Jesus came in order that "He might do His Father's will." The law which God first gave to man was, like Himself, perfect, and so strict, that after Adam's fall, no man was found able to obey it; for if he could, he must have been without sin. God could not alter His terms, for it was impossible for a perfectly holy Being to give any but a holy law; and man must therefore have perished, if the wondrous plan had not been devised, of renewing the covenant which man had broken, between the Father and the Son, and of Jesus keeping that law which man was unable to keep for himself. This, then, was the first thing which made it necessary for Him to come into the world, that the purity of the law might not be infringed: "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God."

But, secondly, these verses tell us that He came, not only "to do God's will," but "to offer a sacrifice for sin." He not only kept God's law for us, but also bore the punishment justly due to us for breaking it. This is what we are commemorating to-day. We have heard all through Lent of the way in which

He kept the law, of His meekness, His gentleness, His purity, His labours. To-day we hear how He bore our punishment by the offering of His body; and how He endured the agonies of the Cross, that we might not have to endure the yet greater agonies of hell.

But even this was not all; for we are told, thirdly, that Jesus came to make a new covenant with His people in place of the one they had broken, and that this covenant was not only "that He would remember their sins and iniquities no more," but that He would put His laws into their hearts, and write them in their minds. So that we see that Jesus not only kept God's law for us, not only bore the punishment due to us for breaking it, but enabled us to keep it for ourselves; and this He did, by bestowing upon us His Holy Spirit. This was the gift He promised to His disciples before He left them, and which He told them would be better for them than even the continuance of His presence; for when the Comforter came, He would guide them into all truth. He promised, too, that this blessing should be continued to His people, that the Holy Ghost should dwell with them, and be in them. And this promise has been fulfilled, and is the crown of all our Saviour's gifts. Through Adam's fall we became sinners, unable of ourselves to think a good thought, or do a good action; but through Christ's mediation, we have an Almighty helper, and if we follow His guidance, we shall be enabled to do those good works which are acceptable in God's sight.

Let us, in the concluding words of this Epistle, exhort one another, that so it may be, and strive to provoke each other to love and to good works, and so much the more as we see the day approaching. Year after year rolls on; Lent after Lent passes away; and each one, as it goes, brings us nearer to that awful day, when He who was offered as a sacrifice will appear as a Judge, no longer ready and

willing to take away sin, but telling those who were not here sprinkled from an evil conscience, to depart from Him into everlasting fire.

Easter Even.

LENT is all but over, and to-morrow morning we shall awake with the glad consciousness that the great holiday of the year is come—the day when we are to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord, and may sing with His Church in all ages the joyful strain, “Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him.”

If we have, as we ought, followed our Saviour through this week of sorrow, if we have entered into the sufferings of the cross, and all He there endured, we shall indeed rejoice that the time has arrived when we may again think of Him ascended into glory; no longer bearing about a weak and suffering body, no longer despised, and rejected of men, no longer without a place in which to lay His head, but dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, freed from all pain and sorrow, and receiving the praise and obedience of adoring Angels.

But before this joyful morning breaks, one day remains, a calm and solemn, but not a sorrowful day, in which we may think of our Saviour as resting in the tomb; and which, forming as it were a link between Lent and Easter, we may profitably spend in reviewing the lessons which the one has taught us, and considering the use we can make of them now the other is come.

* Rom. vi. 9.

To some minds the feeling which Easter brings is this: "Well, Lent is over. The time of self-denial and mortification is passed. We have lived hardly and carefully long enough, and now is the time for a little indulgence." And so they at once relax the reins, give themselves up to enjoyment, and commit more acts of thoughtlessness and folly than at any other time of the year, excepting perhaps at Christmas.

But surely those who thus act cannot rightly have used the season of preparation through which we have just passed, nor can they remember *why* they rejoice. If they called to mind what Easter really is, and why they are to be happy and joyful, they could not imagine they were keeping it by being particularly sinful. It is true we ought to rejoice, but it should be with a heavenly, not an earthly, joy, and we should strive to show to all about us that the self-discipline which we have undergone has had its due effect upon us by making us more meek, and humble, and self-denying, than we were before.

At the beginning of Lent we compared ourselves to soldiers, and Lent to the time of training; and we then saw how useful it was for a portion of the year to be set apart for the especial purpose of self-examination and discipline, in order that when trial came we might be prepared boldly to meet it. But what should we think of a soldier who, when the time of instruction was over, and he was called to march against the enemy, should say, "I am weary of all this discipline. I know how to fight, but I do not mean to practise it; I shall rest and enjoy myself till the war is over?" Surely we should consider him a cowardly dastard, unworthy of the pains and money which had been bestowed upon him.

And equally unworthily are they acting, who at Easter lay aside the care and watchfulness they practised in Lent, and give way to their own inclinations. The retirement of Lent, the extra ser-

vices, the freedom from pleasure and business, are all intended to help us to become stronger and better able to serve our Lord, and to fight against His enemies ; and now that Easter is come, and we must again go forth into the world, we must show that their training has not been in vain, but that we are more than ever determined to be God's faithful soldiers and servants to our lives' end.

God grant that the Lent we have now concluded may have had this effect upon all of us, and that in the words of the Easter Epistle, "we may set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth," knowing that if we do, "when Christ who is our life shall appear, we also shall appear with Him in glory." Amen. Amen.

THE END.



